

God and The People of Ancient Israel

A Brief Historical Survey

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Prologue

The Old Testament is a collection of great literature – historical, cultural, religious, and poetic – which gives us an important insight into the nature and character of the religion of the Jews and of Christianity. Indeed, Christianity cannot exist without the Old Testament, for it is here that Christians find their roots.

The religion of God's people, as revealed in the Bible, is a historical religion, not a religion simply of codes, laws, ceremonies, and regulations. Religions based on codes tend to be void of personal relationships between a man and his god, and therefore are quite remote from the ties of love, compassion, mercy, and justice which should bind adherents to their God. The religions of the Bible – Judaism and Christianity – thrive on the God-man relationship which breathes life into the commandments to do good and shun evil. Obedience is not simply a matter of conforming to a code, a law, or a commandment, but a means of expressing to a loving God, one's immeasurable gratitude for God's loving kindness and grace bestowed upon mankind, whose sins have separated him from God. The initiative in this relationship is always God's, and the ultimate price for man's redemption was paid by the Creator himself.

Judaism and Christianity grew out of a historical context in which the writers and participants perceived God as working in their history, and in the history of the whole world, in order to bring about his own will, namely the salvation of the human race. However the faith and perception of the writers is not the key to understanding what has been written. We cannot dismiss the Biblical claim that in the Bible we have God's revelation to his people.

The Old Testament then is not simply the story of a small Middle Eastern nation whose religious beliefs were intermingled with their history, nor is it the record of the rise of just another world religion. The writers of the Old Testament were Hebrews, with the possible exception of Job, whose world view included a philosophy of history which uniquely combined the absolute sovereignty of God with man's freewill to accept or reject the overtures and guidance of his Creator. These writings strongly annunciate the belief that the world did not come into existence by accident, but by design. Man's presence in the world is not the results of the random accidents of natural selection or the survival of the fittest, but by the design of God. The rise of the religion of Israel was not the product of a synthesis of various belief systems from which they borrowed, but it was based on God's revelation and his intervention in the history of his people.

By viewing the Old Testament from this vantage point, it becomes more than history, more than laws, rules, and regulations, and more than the development of a religion. It is the dynamic interaction of God as he exercises his initiative to bring mankind back to himself in an eternal relationship.

The purpose of this book is to give the student a glimpse into the cultural, social, religious, historical, and political background against which the Biblical events took place.

These are components of the secular and religious history of God's people and they need to be considered. Archaeological discoveries, the history of neighboring nations and their religious beliefs, and the interaction of God's people with those nations all make up a part of this background.

These events did not take place in a vacuum, and we must understand that the various actors in this drama were influenced by the events, people, and institutions around them. No effort has been made to cover the entire Old Testament. Instead I have concentrated primarily on what is generally referred to as the Pentateuch and the books of history. Two prophets, Amos and Hosea are discussed briefly, because they give such vivid insights into the conditions of Israel during a critical period in its history. The other prophetic books are only briefly mentioned or are omitted altogether. The books of wisdom literature are also omitted from our discussions.

Introduction

Storyline of the Old Testament

Introduction

The Bible is a very large book usually printed in small type, and on thin paper. If it were printed on standard book paper using a normal type size, it would make a book of about two thousand pages. Roughly 75%, or about 1,500 of these pages would make up the Old Testament, and 25%, or about 500 pages would make up the New Testament. This in itself is a barrier to most people when it comes to reading the Bible. Most people think of it as just too big, too old, too dry, and too archaic to really spend much time with it. Even those who are interested in the Bible may not be aware of its divisions and layout, and consequently have they difficulty with it.

Understanding the layout of the Bible, and its basic divisions can help as we tackle the job of trying to make sense of a very big book which seem, at first, to lack very good organization.

The Bible is divided into two basic divisions, the Old Testament and the New Testament. Each of these is further divided into sections. The Old Testament is made up of thirty nine books, and the New Testament has twenty-seven, making sixty-six books in all. Since we are studying a survey of the Old Testament, let's take a brief look at it.

The first section is referred to as the Pentateuch, a word which just means "five books." This section begins with Genesis, the first book in the Old Testament, and goes through Deuteronomy, the fifth book. These books are also referred to as the books of Law, because they contain the Law of Moses. However, there is a great deal of history in these books as well. The word Genesis means "beginning." First off, it tells of the creation of the universe, the earth, and all living things including mankind. When we get to the last few verses of the eleventh chapter we are introduced to a man named Abraham. Through his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob, he became the progenitor of a whole nation of people called the Israelites. The family of Jacob, Abraham's grandson, consisted of about seventy people, including his children, in-laws, and grandchildren. They went to Egypt to escape a famine, and his descendants stayed there for hundreds of years.

While in Egypt, the family grew to become the nation of the Israelites. Although they were enslaved in Egypt, they finally escaped, and marched down the Sinai Peninsula to a mountain at the south end. There they received a law from God, which was to be their discipline throughout Old Testament history. After about a year they left Mt. Sinai, and moved toward the land God had promised to give to them, the land of Canaan. The Pentateuch ends here with the book of Deuteronomy.

The next twelve books of the Bible are referred to as "books of history" because they contain the history of the Israelites from the time they entered Canaan until the close of the Old Testament story. This section begins with the book of Joshua, and concludes

with Esther. These seventeen books, the five books of the Pentateuch plus the twelve books of history, make up about 50% of the Old Testament. In this course we will deal almost entirely with these seventeen books.

During the time covered by the twelve books of history, various great men lived and wrote. Some were prophets, some wrote poetry, and some wrote wisdom literature. These writings make up three separate divisions of the Old Testament. They are the wisdom literature (five books, Job through Song of Solomon), the Major prophets (five books, Isaiah through Daniel), and the Minor prophets (twelve books, Hosea through Malachi). This means that although the Old Testament is made up of thirty-nine books, one can read only the first seventeen and get the history of the Old Testament people from creation until about the year 400 B.C.

The next few pages contain a brief outline of the storyline of the Bible as contained in these first seventeen books – the sequence of events. References are furnished for your convenience and general information. You will notice there is some overlapping in the Bible references. This is because the lives of many of these people, and the events surrounding them sometime overlap.

The Storyline

- A. Antediluvian period. This is the period before the great flood. Genesis 1-5.
 - 1. The creation.
 - 2. Adam and Eve, and the beginning of sin.
 - 3. Note that the Bible gives no date for the creation, or any chronological indications during this period of time.
- B. Postdiluvian period. The period following the flood down to the time of Abraham. Genesis 6-11.
 - 1. God's displeasure with mankind.
 - 2. Noah and the flood.
 - 3. The building of the Tower of Babel
 - 4. Various genealogies.
- C. The Great Patriarchs. Genesis. 12-50
 - 1. Abraham. God's promise and covenant. Genesis 12-25
 - a. The call of Abraham. God begins to deal uniquely with Abraham and his descendants through Isaac and Jacob.
 - b. The Bible gives us almost no information concerning God's dealings with other nations of the world.
 - c. Some important people and events in these chapters are:

- 1) Abraham and Lot
 - 2) Birth of Ishmael.
 - 3) Covenant of circumcision.
 - 4) Birth of Isaac.
 - 5) Controversy over Ishmael and Isaac.
2. Isaac. Genesis 21-27
 - a. The promise renewed to Isaac.
 - b. The Birth of Esau and Jacob.
3. Jacob. Genesis 27-50
 - a. Life of Jacob.
 - b. Jacob, Leah, and Rachel, and Jacob's offspring.
 - c. Jacob's return to Canaan.
 - d. Joseph and his brothers.
 - e. Joseph in Egypt.
 - f. Dreams and interpretations, and their consequences.
 - g. Jacob's family goes to Egypt.
 - h. The death of Joseph.
- D. The Enslavement of the Israelites, and their escape from Egypt. Exodus 1-12
 1. The rise of the king who did not know about Joseph.
 2. Birth and early life of Moses.
 3. The misery of the enslavement.
 4. The call of Moses at the burning bush.
 5. Moses and Pharaoh, the king of Egypt.
 - a. Moses' demands that the people be set free.
 - b. The plagues on Egypt.
 6. The Passover and the Exodus.
- E. The giving of the Law of Moses and the wilderness wanderings. Exodus 12 through Deuteronomy 34
 1. Israel at Sinai, and the giving of the Law of Moses.
 2. Wandering in the wilderness and death of Moses.
- F. The conquest of Canaan. Joshua 1-24.
 1. Capture of Jericho.
 2. The battle of Ai.
 3. Other battles in the conquest of Canaan.

4. Division of the land into tribal possessions.
5. Death of Joshua.

G. The Period of the Judges. Judges 1 – I Samuel 8.

1. Repeated account of Joshua's death, and further battles of conquest.
2. Polytheistic influence from the nations left in the land of Canaan.
3. The general character of the judges – religious, political, military leaders.
4. Constant apostasy and return.
5. Two outstanding judges.
 - a. Deborah
 - b. Gideon
6. Samuel, the last judge. I Samuel 1-8.

H. The United Monarchy. I Samuel 8 – I Kings 11.

1. Israel's demand for a king, and Samuel's response.
2. Saul as king. I Samuel 9-31
 - a. Saul's failings.
 - b. Saul and David.
 - c. Saul's death.
3. David as king. II Samuel 1 – I Kings 2
 - a. Expansion of the kingdom under David.
 - b. David and Bathsheba.
 - c. The insurrection of Absalom.
 - d. Restoration of the kingdom to David.
 - e. Solomon appointed to succeed David.
 - f. David's last days and his death.
4. The reign of Solomon. I Kings 2 - 11
 - a. Solomon's request for wisdom.
 - b. The building of the temple and its dedication.
 - c. The splendor of Solomon's kingdom.
 - d. Solomon's death and the rebellion of the northern tribes.

I. The Divided Monarchy. I Kings 12 – II Kings 17

1. Rehoboam and Jeroboam.
2. Ahab and Jezebel

3. Elijah's ministry
 4. Judah's kings.
 5. The Assyrian invasion of the northern kingdom and the captivity of Israel.
- J. Continuation of the Kingdom of Judah. II Kings 18-24.
1. Hezekiah and the Assyrians.
 2. Josiah, the discovery of the Law, and his religious reforms.
 3. The ministry of Jeremiah.
 4. The Babylonian invasion by Nebuchadnezzar.
- K. The Babylonian exile. II Kings 24 - 25
1. The work of Ezekiel.
 2. The fall of Babylon.
- L. The return of the Jews to Canaan. Ezra 1 – Nehemiah 13
1. The Edict of Cyrus.
 2. Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, and Ezra. The restoration of the Law and rebuilding the temple.
 3. Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem.

Conclusion:

1. With the return of the Jews from their exile to the land of Canaan, the Old Testament closes.
2. A period of roughly four hundred years intervened between the close of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament.

Chapter I

The Setting of the Old Testament

Introduction

The Middle Eastern region of the world has had a great influence on the development of Western civilization. It is imperative that serious students of the Bible have a working knowledge of the basic culture and history of this region in order to better understand many of the customs, practices, and values of the people in Bible times. This is particularly true regarding Old Testament studies.

In the very early centuries, the Middle-East developed more or less to itself, and was influenced only slightly by the culture of the Western world. Many important events of world history, both before and during the era of the Biblical Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (c. 2000 – 1700 B.C), were centered in the area which later became known as the Fertile Crescent

The Old Testament world is quite different in its culture and social customs from the world of the New Testament. Furthermore, the culture and customs of the Hebrew people in both Old Testament and New Testament varied considerably from the customs and practices of neighboring nations. Adding to the complexity of the historical and religious situation is the fact that during much of its history, Israel left its religious moorings, and its moral conduct became almost indistinguishable from the practices of its neighbors.

In all of this, one cannot ignore the importance of the geography of the Fertile Crescent, and the general role which geography played in Biblical history. The Fertile Crescent is marked out as a somewhat semicircular area stretching from Egypt northward through Palestine and Syria, moving eastward and southward through Mesopotamia and Babylonia down to the Persian Gulf. It was the land dominated in ancient times by Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. The designation, “Fertile Crescent” was given by James Breasted in the 1800’s, and has come into universal usage. It was the center of civilization from the Stone Age until the beginning of the golden age of Greece in the fifth century B.C. A little later, the military conquests of Alexander the Great (334-323 B.C.) not only had strong political effects, but also religious, cultural, educational, and linguistic overtones as well.

The Influence of Cultural Borrowing

Egypt and the nations of Mesopotamia were seen as ancient geographical focal points of cultural and political energy. As time went on Egypt became less important from a political and military point of view than Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. The influence of Egyptian culture and religious practices however cannot be underestimated.

Cultural borrowing takes place when adjacent cultures adopt some of the religious and secular practices, values, and traditions of each other. This can also take place when na-

tions are tied by commercial interests, though they might not be geographically adjacent. In many cases linguistic and economic practices are also included. The Israelites were usually borrowers not originators. This was due in part, to their view of God and their own sense of identity as the people of God. They were monotheists, and saw themselves as fulfilling a unique place in God's plan. God worked in their history. Therefore they stood somewhat separate from other nations, at first dealing with them more out of necessity than cooperation.

Not only so, but the Law laid strong moral and ethical restrictions on Israel, which were not part of the religious practices of its neighbors. Israel's religious practices were much more restrictive than those of her neighbors, causing Israel usually to be the "borrower" rather than the "originator" in the phenomenon of cultural borrowing. A nation is more likely to borrow less restrictive elements from its neighbor than to borrow greater restrictions. A significant component of Israel's constant apostasy was their failure to maintain their spiritual identity by borrowing the practices of the nations around them. This is vividly seen during the period immediately after the Hebrews began to settle down in Canaan. Many of their experiences during the period of the judges and the divided monarchy demonstrate this.

The World of the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

In the ancient world there was great political and cultural focus on Egypt and Mesopotamia. Between 2000 and 1700 B.C. the Fertile Crescent was overrun by Semitic people who were called "Westerners," or "Amorites." These "Westerners" became rulers of certain important cities in the Fertile Crescent, one of which was the city of Mari, the capital of the Mari Kingdom. It was located on the Euphrates River, about 200 miles east and a bit north of present day Baghdad. By 1900 B.C. there began a migration of many Mesopotamians who settled in Palestine and Syria. It was during this general time period that Terah, the father of Abraham, left Ur of Chaldea (the southern part of Mesopotamia) to move to Haran, a city in the northern part of Syria, near the modern day Turkish border. Ultimately Abraham moved on into Palestine and settled there, spending much of his time in Hebron and Bethel.

In 1937 a cache of about 20,000 clay tablets was discovered in the royal archives on the fifteen acre palace of the ancient king, Zimri-Lim at Mari. Some of these were records of correspondence between Zimri-Lim and Hammurabi, king of Babylon speaking of administrative and personal matters. Others were business documents giving names, dates of transactions, and much information about the business and economic affairs of that time period. These tablets also gave lists of annual events, and the Babylonian dates when certain events had taken place. These tablets therefore have been of great assistance in determining some of the chronology of Mesopotamia during this period. Furthermore these tablets refer to many people whose names corresponded to those in the Biblical narrative. While no attempt is made to identify Biblical characters with those referred to in the Mari Tablets, it does demonstrate that those names were in common use at the time. A variety of customs and laws were also described in these tablets.

During the Mari period Hammurabi was king of Babylon. The dates of the reign of Hammurabi are uncertain but scholars generally believe that he reigned about 1792 B.C. – 1750 B.C. Some archaeologists, including G. Ernest Wright, believe that 1700 B.C. is more nearly accurate. Although there had been friendly relations between Hammurabi and Zimri-Lim of Mari, Hammurabi invaded Mari and claimed it for his own kingdom. One of the greatest accomplishments of Hammurabi was the development of a code of two hundred eighty-two laws which came to be the accepted law for much of that part of the world at that time. These are inscribed on an eight foot stele which is now in the Louvre in Paris. Some of these ordinances have a remarkable similarity to certain laws given to Israel at Mt. Sinai.

The city of Nuzi was located in northern Mesopotamia, about 100 miles southeast of the modern city of Mosul, Iraq. Clay tablets written in cuneiform script were discovered at Nuzi providing details of many of the customs of the sixteenth and fifteenth century B.C. Some Biblical events were a bit confusing prior to the discovery of the Nuzi material. One of the most prominent of these was the relationship of Abraham, Sarah and Isaac with Hagar and Ishmael. Another was the incident of Esau's sale of his birthright and Isaac's patriarchal deathbed blessing to Esau. In addition, the events surrounding Jacob's family leaving Laban and Rachel's theft of the teraphim are better understood when seen in the light of the Nuzi discoveries. These are to be discussed in a later chapter. (See Gen. 25:29-34 and Gen. 31:19ff. See also G.E. Wright, *The Westminster Historical Atlas of the Bible*, p. 30.)

These and other archaeological discoveries have strongly confirmed the historicity of the Biblical narratives of the patriarchal period. A whole group of other academic disciplines have enlightened and influenced modern day thinking about the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. Noteworthy among these are studies of cultural borrowing and comparative religions, the theory of evolution and its application to social and cultural changes, and the development of the scientific method as a means of explaining not only scientific phenomena, but also cultural, social, and spiritual phenomena. It should be noted that each of these is a legitimate discipline, but the application of some of those principles to Biblical studies frequently produces questionable results, because they attempt to answer spiritual and eternal questions from purely scientific and academic points of view.

Chapter II

Archaeological and Historical Data

Introduction

In this chapter we will look at a combination of history, geography, and archaeology as they impact one another, and are integrated into the ancient story of the Fertile Crescent. The eastern segment of the Fertile Crescent is known as Mesopotamia, meaning “between the rivers,” namely the Tigris and Euphrates. Modern day Iraq occupies the major portion of Mesopotamia, but parts of both Syria and Turkey are also included.

From the description given in Genesis 2:10, the Tigris and Euphrates were two of the four streams which were, in some way, connected to the Garden of Eden. In ancient days the rivers and smaller streams made this area good for farming, even though its rainfall was only about 8 inches per year. Through the centuries sediment from the overflow of the rivers, and drift sand from the desert have deposited a layer of unproductive soil which varies from twelve to twenty-five feet thick, reducing the usefulness of the land. At times the hostile environment fostered a belief among some of the ancients that the gods were capricious and unreasonable for allowing the rivers to be so unpredictable.

Ancient Babylon, located in the southern part of Mesopotamia, was a large grain producing area, causing the Assyrians to the north (who had need for the grain) to attempt to control Babylon. The need to trade with countries farther to the west led both Assyria and Babylon into conflict with Egypt and the occupants of Palestine.

Sumer

The extreme southern portion of Mesopotamia was known as Sumer. In the Old Testament it is referred to as Shinar, Gen. 11:1ff, but it is usually included as part of Babylonia. Ur-Nammu, founder of the third dynasty of Ur (c. 2135-2025) referred to himself as “King of Sumer and Akkad,” Akkad being just to the north. Ur-Nammu built a great tower called a ziggurat. Such towers are thought to have been used as temples, and are referred to sometimes as temple-towers. The Ziggurat of Ur, which is preserved in part today, is one of the best representations of this, and has been thought by some to be the Old Testament Tower of Babel. (Gen. 11:1-9). This is a fanciful identification, and there is no evidence of it. There are remains of about thirty-five of these structures in ancient Mesopotamian sites. J.E. Taylor, an archaeologist, discovered an inscription of Nabonidus (ruler of Babylonia from 536-539 B.C.) in the ziggurat identifying the city as “Ur of the Sumerians.” This area is known in most Biblical texts as Chaldea. The ancient city of Ur, 120 miles southeast of Babylon, was the home city of Abraham (Ur of the Chaldees) and is thought to have been a city with a population of about 250,000.

Assyria

Geographically, Assyria was north of Babylonia, occupying the very northern part of Mesopotamia. Its capital was the ancient city of Nineveh, which was located just across the Tigris River from modern day Mosul, Iraq. The people of Assyria and Babylonia were ethnically, linguistically, and religiously practically the same. Their political history is different however, and they experienced times of great conflict with each other. Very war-like, the Assyrians were noted in the ancient world for their ruthless treatment and torture of their enemies.

Many of the Assyrian kings played important roles in their conflicts with the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Appearing in the Old Testament accounts are the names of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.), referred to as King Pul in II Kings 15:19, Shalmaneser V (727-722 B.C.) who died during the three year siege to the city of Samaria, 725-722 B.C., Sargon II (722-705 B.C.) who completed the destruction of Samaria and took Israel captive, and Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.) who challenged King Hezekiah, resulting in the building of Hezekiah's water tunnel.

Babylon

A wide variety of archaeological discoveries has enhanced our knowledge of the Babylonians as well as other nations of Mesopotamia. Some of the better known of these discoveries are discussed below.

The Babylonian-Sumerian myths of creation came to light between 1848 and 1876 when George Smith and other British archaeologist excavated the Nineveh site of the palace of Ashurbanipal who was king of Assyria from 668 until 626 B.C. Here they found seven tablets written in cuneiform script giving an account of the creation. Archaeologists have concluded that they probably originated much earlier than Ashurbanipal, perhaps even earlier than the days of Hammurabi. Scholars have reason to believe that they may go back to the time of the Sumerians, the precursors of the Babylonians. The Babylonian account of creation and the Biblical account have some striking similarities, but also some very important differences.

Both of these stories begin in similar fashion. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," Gen. 1:1. "Time was when above heaven was not named; below to the earth no name was given," Babylonian Creation Epic, Tablet I. Both stories are divided into seven parts. There are seven days of creative activity in Genesis, and seven tablets describing the creation in the Babylonian Epic.

Both stories speak of a sort of chaos at the beginning of the creation process, but they differ widely in their information. The Biblical account is content to just mention that "the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters," Gen. 1:2, while a rather lengthy polytheistic description is found in the Babylonian Epic. In the Babylonian Epic, the god Apsu (male) and the goddess Tiamat (female) generated a variety of gods and goddesses. Strife and

competition arose between these gods and goddesses, and Apsu decided to destroy them. His plot was discovered by the great god Ea who killed the god Apsu. After this, Ea begat Marduk who became the god of Babylon, and the hero of the Creation Epic. After these events Tiamat, the goddess wife of Apsu was urged by the other gods to generate an army of monsters to fight Ea. Tiamat was killed when she attempted to flee, and Marduk created the cosmos out of her corpse. Many other differences are present, but these illustrate the character of these differences.

Stories of the Flood

In Genesis 6-9 we have the story of a worldwide flood, the hero of which was Noah. He and his family are the only survivors. The idea of a massive flood is not confined to the Bible, but such tales are found in many of the ancient civilizations of the world. The *National Geographic* has stated that “Almost every culture on earth includes an ancient flood story. Details vary, but the basic plot is the same: Deluge kills all but a lucky few.” The *Geographic* tells about the work of The Black Sea Expedition whose principal investigators are David Mindell of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Fredrik Hiebert of the University of Pennsylvania. Underwater archaeologist Cheryl Ward of Texas A&M University at Galveston collaborated with them. Robert Ballard, director of the Black Sea Expedition and Harvard University archaeologist Lawrence Stager found the world’s oldest deep-sea shipwrecks in the eastern Mediterranean Sea in mid-1999. (Go to <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/blacksea/ax/frame.html> for additional details.)

Probably the best known non-Biblical account of an ancient massive flood is found in the Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic. The story of a great flood is told to Gilgamesh, the king of the Sumerian city of Uruk (Biblical Erech), by the flood’s only survivor, Uta-napishtim. The story begins with the death of Enkidu, the dear friend of Gilgamesh, causing Gilgamesh to become fearful of death. In order to overcome this fear, he went out seeking immortality. Supposedly the only answer was with Uta-napishtim, whom he found living with his wife “beyond the Waters of Death.” So begins the story of a great flood as Uta-napishtim related it to Gilgamesh who, in turn, recorded the Epic. It is thought to have originated about 2000 B.C. and is contained on 12 cuneiform tablets.

As is the case of the Babylonian Creation Epic, there are both similarities and differences between the Gilgamesh Epic and the Biblical flood. Both show that a catastrophe is coming and the people generally are unaware of it. Both speak of the building of a vessel as a means of escape, the flood destroyed other people, the vessel came to rest on a mountain, a bird was sent out in both cases, and a sacrifice was offered at the time of disembarkation.

But, there are also significant differences. In the Biblical account the flood was universal whereas the Babylonian account shows it to be a great flood, but it was localized. The polytheism of the Babylonian legend is in strong contrast with the monotheism of the Biblical account. In the Babylonian account the gods disagreed and blame each other, and some of the gods were overcome with fear and crouched like dogs. Such accounts as

the Gilgamesh Epic can certainly not be used as proof of the Biblical flood, but it is quite undeniable that their prevalence in the ancient world causes one to think in terms of plausibility.

Persia

Unlike the ancient Greeks, the Persians did not cultivate a historian, such as Herodotus, to tell their story. Consequently we are dependent on other sources for early Persian history, most of which were hostile to Persia. There are, however, some inscriptions and other archaeological discoveries which have given us first hand information concerning certain rulers of Persia. It was under the reign of Cyrus the Great (539-530 B.C.) that the captives Jews were allowed to return to Judea.

The ancient city of Persepolis, built by King Darius the Great (521-485 B.C.), was the capital of Persia. Xerxes, the son of Darius succeeded his father, ruling from 485 B.C. until 465 B.C. Xerxes, referred to as Ahasuerus in a number of versions of the Bible, was the Persian king during the days of Esther.

The city of Persepolis was destroyed in 330 B.C. by Alexander the Great. Among the important ruins of the city are the spectacular staircase going to the palace area, portions of the old palace with its columns, and the winged bulls which stood as symbolic sentinels, along with various brief inscriptions from Darius.

The Behistun Inscription is one of the most important archaeological discoveries ever made. It is located on a 300 foot high cliff, about 25 miles east of modern day Teheran, Iran. The deciphering of this inscription was done in 1843 by Sir Henry Rawlinson, then a young British army officer who was sent to Teheran to help reestablish the Persian army. During part of his youth Rawlinson had lived in India, where he learned the Persian language, and other dialects.

While in Teheran he became interested in exploring the inscription which, for all practical purposes, was completely inaccessible. Adding to the problem of the high cliff was the fact that the inscription itself was about twenty-five feet high and fifty feet wide. Risking his own life, Rawlinson improvised a ladder and ropes, and got close enough to make a papier-mâché cast of the script. He and others then began the task of trying to decipher the newly found Babylonian script in this multilingual inscription. The three languages of the inscription were Old Persian, Babylonian, and Elamite, and Rawlinson theorized that the Babylonian and Elamite columns may contain a translation of the story written in the Persian column. This Babylonian script is called cuneiform, and was used as the alphabet for many Middle Eastern languages. Rawlinson's work in deciphering this script did for cuneiform what the Rosetta Stone had earlier accomplished for Egyptian hieroglyphics. Archaeologists were finally able to read the many cuneiform tablets and inscriptions which used this ancient alphabet. The Behistun Inscription is an account of the victories of the Persian King Darius I (521-485 B.C.).

Egypt

While Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived in the land of Canaan (c.2000 – 1700 B.C.), they had contact with Egypt. It is not clear just how many years the family of Jacob and the Israelites spent in Egypt, first as guests of Pharaoh then as slaves. It could have been as long as 430 years (Exodus 12:40), but the exact time span is difficult to determine from the chronological data available. Because of this lack of chronological information given in the Bible, there is some question as to the exact time when Joseph entered Egypt, but a year close to 1700 B.C. is widely accepted by historians. Egyptian influence in Canaan cannot be underestimated. The designation “Pharaoh” is not the name of the king, but a throne title meaning “great house.”

Between 1500 B.C. and 1200 B.C. the southern part of Canaan was under Egyptian political and economic control. The occupants of Canaan paid taxes to Egypt, but were allowed a considerable degree of political and military freedom. They could govern themselves to a limited extent, and could go to war against other nations or with each other, but could not war against Egypt.

The Tel el Amarna Letters give excellent information concerning conditions during this time. This discovery was made up of about 400 clay tablets written in cuneiform, consisting primarily of communications exchanged between the Egyptian, Palestinian, Syrian, Babylonian, and Assyrian governments. The letters were discovered in Amarna, Egypt in 1886 by a peasant woman who was scavenging through the site of the palace of Pharaoh Amenophis IV, also known as Akhenaton, (1370 B.C.-1353 B.C.). They were later evaluated and published by archaeologists. The letters tell of great internal strife, rebellion, and confusion among the various cities in Canaan. They also mention marauding tribes of invaders referred to as the “Habiru,” who were once thought by some to have been the Hebrews. This identification is not accepted by archaeologists today, since the term probably refers to a very broad spectrum of wanderers or nomads present in the Middle East. These people are also mentioned in the Mari Tablets, the Nuzi Tablets, and other discoveries.

During the period of Egypt’s New Kingdom the Israelites, who had multiplied greatly, were considered a possible threat to the Egyptians in much the same way as the Hyksos had been. This may very well have been the reason the Israelites were enslaved. Various archaeological discoveries have validated the authentic character of the Joseph story showing that the titles used and other items are to be found in Egyptian inscriptions.

Some of these are:

- Joseph being called the “overseer of the house” of Potiphar
- The rank of chief of the butlers and chief of the bakers
- The importance of dreams and their interpretations
- Shepherds being an abomination to the Egyptians
- The 110 years lifespan of Joseph - considered by Egyptians as symbolic of the ideal lifespan

The Rosetta Stone

The discovery of the Rosetta Stone and its subsequent deciphering became the key to unlocking the ancient Egyptian writing known as hieroglyphics. In 1799 some of Napoleon's workers recovered a large piece of black basalt stone near Rosetta, Egypt. On it they found three kinds of writing in separate sections. One of these languages was Greek which could be understood and translated. The other two were Egyptian hieroglyphics, and demotic (common writing). The stone had been erected in 196 B.C., and the text, easily read from the Greek section, described an honor given to King Ptolemy V (c. 203-181 B.C.) for exempting the temples of Egypt from certain taxes. Assuming the three languages to have identical content, three scholars set out to discover how to read the Egyptian hieroglyphics and the demotic languages by using the Greek as the base-key language. The final and most brilliant work was done between 1818 and 1822 by Jean Francois Champollion, a French linguist. He is generally credited with unlocking the ancient Egyptian script. This made a wide range of Egyptian inscriptions readable to Egyptologists. The Rosetta Stone is now in the British Museum. As previously stated, the Behistun Inscription served the same purpose for deciphering cuneiform writing.

Chapter III

The Land and the People of Palestine

Introduction

Most of the events in the Old Testament took place in a rather small strip of land referred to as Canaan. Its borders extend from Hamath in the north (near Turkey) to Gaza in the south (near Egypt). Following the conquest of Canaan, Israel experienced relatively little geographic expansion until the time of David (c.1000 – 922 B.C.). Solomon, David's son and successor, did very little to expand his territory, but he did much to enhance the nation's economy and international influence. Even the conquests of David were somewhat limited when compared with the exploits of the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians. Israel's borders never moved farther north than the mid-section of Syria, nor farther south than Ezion-geber, a port city at the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba.

The international prominence of Israel during Solomon's reign created numerous temptations for the people to adopt the customs, practices, and religions of the surrounding nations. By the eighth century B.C. the prophets, Amos and Hosea in particular, spoke out in clarion tones against the gross immorality of the people, the abuse of the poor by the upper class, unfair and dishonest monetary policies, and injustices in the courts in both the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. During much of the Divided Kingdom period, particularly from Omri forward, Israel's success in foreign trade, local economic accomplishments, and the general affluence of the upper class produced many social and religious problems, which were being ignored by the people and their religious and political leaders. Even with all of this corruption, they continued to offer their sacrifices, observe their Sabbaths and holy days, and perform many of their holy obligations. Israel was very religious but very immoral. During the latter part of the Divided Kingdom period, the Lord seems to have been thought of as a sort of tribal or national god for Israel rather than the God of all creation. The deadening of their moral and religious values also deadened the sense of mission for which they had been designated by God.

Geographical Factors in Israel's History

The geographic location of Palestine strongly influenced the history and character of the Israelite nation. The fact that Palestine was situated on some of the most important trade routes of the ancient Middle East emphasizes its strategic importance as it relates to political, military, and economic factors. In the ancient world, trade with other nations was not only a matter of survival, but it also brought control, power, and wealth to a country. With Egypt to the south, Syria to the north, the Mediterranean Sea to the west, and Arabia and other countries to the east, Palestine was uniquely a buffer-state. This was one of the fundamental reasons Israel was so strongly tempted to be drawn into the affairs of its neighbors, and also why the land-locked countries of Mesopotamia wanted to control Palestine. As a result, the more powerful nations, Assyria, Babylon, and Persia, were striving to build vast empires and were a frequent threat to Israel.

The land known as Palestine is also referred to by the common names of Canaan, the Promised Land, and the Holy Land. The word Palestine means the “land of the Philistines,” although the Philistines occupied only a small portion of the southwestern part of the land. Originally the term Palestine was used to designate the area from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River, but later it came to include a considerable portion east of the Jordan. This strip of land has had an influence on world history far out of proportion to its size. It is comprised of about 6,000 square miles, but if the area east of the Jordan River is included, it is about 10,000 square miles. The expression, “from Dan to Beersheba,” constitutes the north-south extremities of the land, covering about 150 miles. From Gaza, near the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea is only about 54 miles.

General Topography of the Land

A geological fault runs from Syria down to the Dead Sea along the Jordan River gorge. It continues through Arabah and the Red Sea on into Africa. This is referred to as the Central Rift or Jordan Rift. The melting snow from Mt. Hermon, a 9,100 foot peak in southern Syria, flows into Lake Huleh, a marshy area which is 229 feet above sea level. In turn, the waters of Lake Huleh flow about ten miles southward into the Sea of Galilee. In the course of these ten miles the altitude goes from 229 feet above sea level to 696 feet below sea level, a drop of 925 feet.

The Sea of Galilee is pear shaped, about 8 miles wide at its widest point, and 13 miles long, with its deepest point just over 150 feet. It is also known as the Sea of Chinnereth, Lake of Gennesaret, and Sea of Tiberias. Because of the mountains on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee and surrounding areas, life in Galilee has been linked almost entirely to the areas on the western side. The climate and rainfall in these sections of Galilee have made it an ideal agricultural area. The general topography of the land surrounding the Sea of Galilee can cause severe storms to arise very quickly.

The Jordan River flows out of the southern side of the Sea of Galilee, moving southward to the Dead Sea. The linear distance is only about 65 miles, but its serpentine route actually covers about 200 miles. When it empties into the Dead Sea it has dropped to 1290 feet below sea level. Since the Sea of Galilee is 696 feet below sea level, it means that the Jordan River has dropped 594 feet in the course of 65 linear miles.

The fact that the river annually overflows its banks and the existence of many small tributary streams made the Jordan Valley an agriculturally productive area. At the time the Israelites entered the land, agriculture was the primary occupation of the Canaanites. They were in firm control of these lands when the Israelites invaded, and this fact may be one reason that Israel chose to first occupy the hill country to the west, before beginning to drive the Canaanites to the north.

The terminus of the Jordan River is the Dead Sea. Because it has no outlet, its water consists of about 25% salt and other minerals. In modern times some of these minerals have been gainfully extracted. Some which have proved to be economically profitable are salt,

bromine (used to make certain dyes, and as anti-knock additive to gasoline), potash (used to make soap and some explosives), and gypsum (used in making plaster, plaster of Paris, cement, and similar items). Petroleum deposits have also been found in the area, and tar pits (asphalt) are spoken of in Gen. 14:10. Greek and Latin writers, along with the Biblical writer of Genesis attest to conflagrations which have taken place in the area, probably because of the presence of these petroleum gases.

Archaeological discoveries near the Valley of Sittim have led scholars to believe that the ancient city of Sodom was located near the southeastern tip of the Dead Sea. It is known that at one time this was a well inhabited and fertile area, as shown in the Biblical story of Abraham and Lot. The nation of Moab was located on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea, with Ammon just north of the Sea and a bit east. Edom stretched from the south tip of the Dead Sea down to Ezion-geber on the Gulf of Aqaba. Each of these countries played an important role in Israel's history.

The Coastal Plain

The strip of land along the Mediterranean shore from a point just south of the modern day Gaza Strip to the present day city of Haifa, Israel is referred to as the Coastal Plain. It is made up of two smaller plains, the Philistine Plain stretching roughly from the Gaza Strip to the city of Joppa, just south of Tel Aviv, and the Plain of Sharon, from Tel Aviv to Haifa.

The Philistine Plain received its name from the Philistine people ("the Sea People") who probably migrated to the area from Crete or some of the Greek islands. They first attempted to settle in Egypt in the 12th century B.C., but were driven out by Rameses III about 1188 B.C. Following this expulsion, they settled in the southern part of the Coastal Plain, which eventually was named after them – Philistia. This designation was later changed to Palestine, and was applied to a much wider area than the small territory occupied by the Philistines. They founded five city-states, similar to the Greek city-states, of a later date, with a ruler over each. In the Old Testament these rulers are sometimes referred to as the Lords of the Philistines. Their primary cities were Gaza, Gath, Ekron, Ashdod, and Ashkelon, some of which have been excavated by archaeologists. This was one of the most fertile areas of Palestine, and agriculture has flourished there from ancient to modern times.

The Plain of Sharon stretches from modern Tel Aviv north to the port city of Haifa, which is also the location of Mt. Carmel. This Plain was a poorly drained area, somewhat marshy, and suitable for only specialized agriculture. Almost all of the shoreline of the Coastal Plain is unbroken, with very few sites suitable for natural harbors. Therefore the inhabitants of this part of Palestine generally had very little commerce on the Mediterranean Sea.

To the north of the Plain of Sharon was an area which the Greeks later called Phoenicia. It had two important harbors, Tyre and Sidon. After the exodus from Egypt, the Israelites invaded the land of Canaan, ultimately forcing many of the Canaanites out of the southern part of Palestine. The result was that the Canaanites settled in the coastal area north

of Mt. Carmel in what is roughly the modern day country of Lebanon. The land just east of the Mediterranean coast has a rough topography, and the fertile areas are small and cannot be extensively or profitably cultivated. This prevented these Canaanites from continuing their former agricultural enterprises, but they developed into one of the grandest maritime nations in ancient history. Their most important export was an expensive purple dye which they made from shell fish found in the Mediterranean Sea. This dye became the color of royalty in the ancient world. The two harbor cities of Tyre and Sidon were closely guarded by the Phoenicians because these harbors provided the outlet for their most important exports. The Phoenician alphabet came from these people.

Israel, to its detriment and ultimate downfall, copied many of the customs, cultural traditions, and religious practices of the Canaanites. The devotion of Jezebel to Baal worship exemplifies this phenomenon. Archaeology has shown some of the influence of Canaanite culture in Israel's art, jewelry, weapons, dishes, etc. Solomon's friendship with Hiram, king of Tyre is mentioned in I Kings 5, which also shows that he supplied Solomon with cedar, stone, and other supplies as well as workers to help build the Jerusalem temple. Scholars generally believe that the artistic architectural character of Solomon's temple was influenced by the art and architecture of Tyre and Sidon. From the beginning of the conquest of Canaan, God had sternly warned Israel not to become involved in the life, behavior, and religion of the Canaanites. Their violation of this injunction finally cost them dearly.

The Canaanites were a tribal people, and were never really united. The geography of the land lent itself to this arrangement since mountains and rivers divided the land making unity difficult in ancient times. Each large city had its own king or ruler, sometimes referred to as a lord, but at times they created loose confederations and frequently cooperated in war. For example, five cities of the Canaanites, Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon, banded together against Joshua, but they were defeated in the Valley of Aijlon. (See Joshua 10:29-43.)

The Hill Country

A continuous range of hills and mountains, just east of the Coastal Plain, extends from the southern part of Syria to the southern part of Judah. This area is generally known as the Hill Country, comprising three general divisions, in Palestine. These are the Hill Country of Galilee, of Samaria, and of Judah.

The most rugged of these hills and mountains reach as high as 4,000 feet in the northern part of Galilee, but the southern portion is less hilly. Intermittently there are level plains, valleys, and places in the rolling hills which are very fertile and productive. The Plain of Esdraelon (also known as the Valley of Jezreel), begins at Mt. Carmel and extends south-eastward to the Jordan Rift. It is one of the most important of these plains. The fortress city of Megiddo, originally a Canaanite stronghold, is strategically located at the edge of the Valley of Jezreel, and it became the site of many decisive battles with invaders. The Israelites conquered the city when they invaded Canaan and finally Solomon turned it

into an Israelite fortified city. This valley offers an easy unimpeded route from the coast to the Jordan River Valley.

The hill country of Samaria is the geographic center of the country, from north to south. The two most conspicuous mountain peaks are Mt. Ebal, known as the mount of cursing, and Mt. Gerizim, known as the mount of blessing. The city of Samaria, built by Omri the King of Israel (c. 876-869 B.C.), was located here, and he made it the capital city of the Northern Kingdom.

The hill country of Judah has no particularly distinguishing characteristics which differ from those of Galilee and Samaria.

The Shephelah, the Negev, and the Trans-Jordan Plateau

The Shephelah is the designation of the lowlands just east of the Philistine Plain. It was an important agricultural area (grain, olives, vineyards), and was well populated and heavily fortified during Israelite times. The Negev (also spelled Negeb) is the southland, including the cities of Beer-sheba and Kadesh-barnea. Its climate is generally semiarid, and the area can be productive only by carefully conserving water and developing irrigation systems. During Bible times it was fairly heavily populated.

The Trans-Jordan Plateau is the hilly area east of the Central Rift. Going from north to south, the Trans-Jordan Plateau consists of Bashan, Gilead, and Ammon. Moab and Edom are sometimes included in describing the Plateau, but they do not rightfully belong in this group because they are located further south, along the eastern shore of the Dead Sea.

In Bashan the rainfall is light, and the soil is rich. In spite of its topography, it supports a considerable amount of agriculture and cattle grazing. In Bible times it was also a good producer of grain crops. It is not mentioned frequently in Bible history.

Gilead, the next area to the south, is well watered by rainfall and a number streams and rivers which flow through it. In Bible times it was considered an important agricultural area, and it was heavily populated. Gilead is also known for its spices, herbs, forests and forest products. Jeremiah 8:22 asks, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?" Some of the herbs and spices of Gilead were used for medicinal purposes.

Ammon is located just west of the Jordan River as part of the modern day country of Jordan. The chief city of the Ammonites was Rabbah Ammon, which is now the city of Amman, Jordan. The people of Ammon descended from an incestuous relation between Lot and his younger daughter. Ammon is a rather dry area, the eastern expanse of which is mostly desert.

The People of Canaan and Their Gods

The people of Canaan were a mixture of tribes from many different lands. Among these were the Hittites from the eastern portion of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey), the Jebusites who were the inhabitants of Jebus (Jerusalem), the Amorites from the Arabian Desert, and the Horites from Edom and the south. Because of the continuing wars and strife among these people, they were in a weakened condition when the Israelites invaded the land in the 13th century B.C. Other factors also contributed to this weakness. Some of these were the oppression and taxation imposed by the Egyptians, governmental corruption, the feudal type of social structure which created a small upper class and a very large poor class with no middle class in between. G. Ernest Wright and other archaeologists have generally confirmed this, showing that there was abundant very cheap labor, but at the same time very elaborate houses for the wealthy.

The polytheistic religions of Canaan were characterized by barbarism and a strong emphasis on sexual practices. In the Canaanite Pantheon, El was the father of the gods, and Asherah was his wife. Baal was their chief offspring. His name meant "lord," but the Syrians called him "Hadad." The throne name for some Syrian kings was "Ben Hadad," which shows something of their ideas about the relationship of their king to one of their gods. Baal was supposedly in control of the forces of nature, and was the god of reproduction of humans, animals, and vegetation. In addition he was thought to control the rain, storms, and other natural forces. Ashtoreth, the goddess of love and fertility, was Baal's wife. The gods and goddesses of the Canaanites had no sense of moral character, and their behavior was really lower than that of society in general. It is easy to see why those who worshipped these gods were, themselves, very immoral and barbarous.

By contrasting the religion of Baal and that of Israel, we see great differences. The God of Israel is seen working in the history of his people and of the world, whereas with Baal and the other gods of the Canaanite pantheon, would compete with each other, destroy each other, and live very immoral lives. Their power has to do with various forces of nature and fertility of plants, animals, and humans, but without regard to elevating the character of mankind, or instilling a code of ethics and morals. With Baal worship, as with many other pagan religions, there were bizarre and perverted sexual practices which were reflected the basic conduct of those who adhered to those religions. The God of Israel is seen as sovereign, demanding his people to aspire to lofty ethical, moral, and religious practices. As a God of justice he punishes evil behavior, but as a God of mercy he is willing to forgive those who truly repent.

Baal worship consisted of sexual practices and perversions of all sorts, sacred prostitution, and snake worship. At times the general polytheism of the Canaanites and Ammonites included human (infant) sacrifices, particularly practiced in the worship of Molech (sometime spelled Moloch). This is in great contrast to the purity and holiness demanded in the Law of Moses which was given to the Israelites. See Leviticus 18. Such practices however became part of the Israelite apostasy, and were carried out during the reigns of Ahaz, Manasseh, and other kings of both Israel and Judah. See II Chron. 28:3, II Kings 21:6. Even Solomon allowed the worship of Molech. See I Kings 11:7-8. Josiah dese-

crated Topheth, an area in Jerusalem in the Valley of Ben Hinnom. Altars to Molech along with his statue were located in the Valley of Ben Hinnom but Josiah's desecration of these items rendered them unfit for the sacrifice of children. See II Kings 23:10. The nature of the fertility rites and practices seem to have made this religion attractive to other nations. The gross immorality of the Hebrews, denounced by the Old Testament prophets, can certainly be attributed in part to this influence. When one looks at these practices, it is easy to understand why God warned Israel not to make treaties with the occupants of the land, but to drive them out. He also told Israel that he would use his own people to punish the idolatry and evil practices of the occupants of Canaan. See Gen. 15:13-16, Lev. 18:28-30. Unfortunately Israel adopted the practices of the Canaanites, and suffered the same fate as they suffered.

Chapter IV

The Creation and the Introduction of Evil

Genesis 1:1—2:25, 3:1-24

Introduction

The Bible does not give a time or date for creation, nor does it tell us the age of the earth, or just when “the beginning” was. The opening statement of the Bible simply affirms that, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” Gen. 1:1-2. To say the least, this is an all-encompassing statement which is certainly not designed to be a scientific explanation of the earth’s creation. Much of the controversy concerning the age of the earth comes from the seventeenth century chronology prepared by Archbishop James Ussher (1581-1656) who basically added up a group of numbers in the genealogies of the Bible and concluded that the date of creation was 4004 B.C. For decades his chronology appeared in the margin of the King James Version of the Bible and some others, and many people concluded that this chronology was historically correct.

The Bible does not begin by giving a compilation of evidence for the existence of God. This is not the purpose of the Bible in general, or of the Genesis account of creation. The text begins with the assumption that God exists, and then it informs us that the cosmos is a product of his intelligent design. The cosmos did not come into existence by accident nor did it spring into existence of its own accord or by spontaneous generation.

If one tries to make a scientific statement out of the creation story, the true purpose of that account will probably be overlooked. This is not to say that the Biblical account is anti-science, or that it is contrary to science, but one must remember that science is not its goal. The first two chapters of Genesis are an affirmation of the faith of Israel. This should not be thought of as simply Israel’s view of what took place in creation in contrast to the Babylonian or other myths. We must remember that it was through the Israelite nation that God’s work in history is seen most vividly. The Genesis account must be seen as the faith of Israel as well as God’s revelation.

The Book of Genesis

The first eleven chapters of Genesis are introductory in nature. With the possible exception of the flood story in Genesis 6-9, few details are given concerning the events. See Genesis 1-11. Even less is known about the dates of these events. The account is rushing toward its real goal, which begins to unfold in chapter 12. However, in these first eleven chapters there are some very important truths, and necessary theological concepts which we must not pass over lightly. We cannot read of the creation of Adam and Eve without thinking in terms of our own mortality, our origin, our value in God’s sight, the reason for our existence, and the final goal of all of this. On the other hand, we must ask some questions. “Are we all just highly developed animals with no morality except that which

is of our own making or the making of our culture and society?” “Do we have any destiny, or real mission, or, in light of the magnitude of the whole universe, are we infinitesimally small and insignificant?” One thing that is firmly established in the early chapters of Genesis is that, in God’s sight, each of us has unfathomable worth, and is deeply loved by his Creator who is determined to guide mankind into paths of righteousness.

In Genesis chapter 12, we have the introduction of a saga which unfolds through the history of a chosen nation, and finds its ultimate fulfillment in the incarnation and atonement perfected by Jesus Christ. Genesis then sets the stage for all that is to follow, not only in the Bible, but throughout the entire history of mankind, for in Genesis we find the beginning of the dynamics of God’s work in history.

The Days of Creation

Some contend that the “days of creation” constitute normal twenty-four days as we know them, while others controvert this interpretation. It is interesting to note that it was not until the fourth day that the solar system was created, marking out seasons and day and night. What then is the meaning of the expression, “And there was evening and there was morning – the second day”? We are not told, and that in itself is important, for it shows us that the expression “evening and morning” and the exact meaning of “day” are open to a variety of views. The length of these days, whether measured in hours or in eons of time, is not the important thing in the creation account. That question can never be decided by either religionists or secularists since the Bible gives no information on the process, and there were no “eye witnesses.” This means that science cannot bring us an ultimate answer concerning the origin of the universe and life.

What then is the real value of the Biblical creation accounts? Are we missing an important component here, or is the creation account recorded simply to give a starting point for history? We cannot help but make some comparisons here with the Babylonian Creation Epic discussed in chapter II. In that bizarre myth we see jealous angry gods plotting against each other, and fighting and killing each other. Finally one of the gods creates the cosmos from the corpse of a dead goddess. Not exactly an inspiring tale. It is probably safe to assume that Israel knew some of these tales of creation.

The Genesis account is notable for its simplicity and its lack of superficial adornment or answers to questions of curiosity. At intervals during the creation process there is the simple statement, “And God saw that it was good.” At the conclusion of it all, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” Genesis 1:31. We must see all of this through the eyes of Israel, since it was through them that this record has been preserved. In the account of creation, Israel could see that the God in whom they believed was a God of goodness and power and a lover of beauty. He was one who loved his creation and his creatures. His creative initiative emphasizes his sovereignty over all that he had created, but not with a competitive spirit depicted in the Babylonian Epic. Man is created, not as one more animal, but in the image of God himself. He is not a plaything for the Creator, but he holds a dynamic kinship to his Creator. God is watching out for man’s welfare, for he says “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a help suitable for him.”

Genesis 2:18. Thus we have the implicit statement of God's desire that man's life be one of love, happiness, and contentment.

The Introduction of Evil into the World

Genesis 3 is frequently passed off as a simple storyline of Adam and Eve "eating the apple," with little consideration given to the importance and depth of this account. Many very interesting and important theological concepts and questions are found here, some of which determine a great deal of the remaining content of the Bible. What is evil? Can "good" exist if there is no "evil" to help define it? What are some differences between the presence of evil and the possibility of evil? What was the sin of Adam and Eve really all about? What does this event say about the nature of sin? Is there a relationship between evil and suffering? What about the sovereignty of God in these events? How can we know what is evil and what is good? Did the sin of Adam result in the necessity for man to work for his living? None of these questions can be answered to our complete satisfaction, but we must attempt to pull back the curtain and look behind the scenes for a glimpse into the nature of the first sin and its consequences. Of course there will be a great chasm of difference in the way a religionist and a secularist will answer most of these questions. It is not our purpose to attempt to answer each of them, but to encourage further contemplation on the importance of this simple, yet very profound story.

The problem of evil has challenged philosophical and theological minds from time immemorial. Its corollaries are many, and frequently its problems cannot be answered by finite minds. It is interesting to note that the serpent is not identified in the narrative as the Devil, nor is he called Satan. He is simply referred to as the serpent. Chronologically it is not until Job 1:6 that the word Satan occurs in the Bible, although from the point of view of the sequence of the books as they are arranged in the Old Testament, I Chronicles 21:1 refers to Satan's influence on David when he took the census of the people of Israel. The word Devil is not found in the Old Testament at all, but first occurs in Matthew 4:1 regarding the temptations of Christ. Revelation 12:9 and 20:2 equate the three, Satan, Devil, and Serpent, and the New Testament is replete with references to Satan and the Devil, or the Serpent as Satan. The word Satan means adversary or accuser.

The basic setting of the first sin is important. God had created everything "good," consequently Adam and Eve are assumed to have been completely unaware of the existence of such a thing as "evil." This does not mean that evil did not exist somewhere, but it seems not to have been an apparent part of the earthly environment. Therefore we believe it is safe to conclude that Adam and Eve knew only "good."

The serpent's challenge was to the sovereignty of God, and God's right to place restrictions on Adam and Eve. The temptation was really for them to declare their own independence or autonomy. "Did God say?" is the question. The serpent seems to picture this restriction as quite arbitrary, trite, and unreasonable, as if to ask, "Why should God have the right to threaten you with death by giving you such a trivial restriction?" The serpent then appeals to the desirability of freedom – no restrictions – by saying, "You

will not die, but you will be like God, knowing not just good, but knowing both good and evil.” At first this seems to be an appeal to pride – “You shall know,” but it is really an appeal for freedom or autonomy. “Right now you know only ‘good.’ God is withholding something from you. It is the whole world of ‘evil’ which has a lot to offer. It’s enjoyable, it’s fun, and it’s exciting, but God is restricting both your freedom and your experience. He won’t allow you the liberty to experience this enjoyable dimension of life. Instead he gives you an empty threat of death. You will not really die, but you will experience a new world of ‘evil’, and will be like God who knows both good and evil.” Sin says to us, “This can give you a better understanding of life and make your life more enjoyable, more exciting, and pleasurable. You can have more money, more enjoyment, and more independence – choose the good life. These are the things of which God’s restrictions are depriving you. He is withholding from you a great part of the real joy of life.”

Notice that Adam and Eve made a decision about who is in control, and who determines what is “best” for them. Contemporary society finds servitude very difficult to accept, but the Bible teaches that we all serve some one or something. One says, “As long as I don’t harm others, I will decide for myself what is right or wrong without having to be enslaved to any outside moral or ethical code.” This however, is a statement of self-enslavement, and can lead to all sorts of self-righteousness, addictions, self-abuse, self-centeredness and terrible unhappiness. It is neither a practical solution nor a right decision because it is focused entirely on oneself.

This is exactly what Satan would like for every person to believe, and it brings up the very essence of his approach to Adam and Eve and to all mankind. His only tool is deceit. All that Satan wants is to get a person to place a certain value on an activity or deed when, in actual fact that value does not exist. That value may take the form of peer approval, advancement at work, money, pleasure, or a host of other things. The serpent succeeded with Adam and Eve by representing to them that the “value” of knowing both good and evil and being independent from God’s authority would be better than living with just “good” and allowing God to rule their lives. Temptation says, “Good is not nearly as exciting or fulfilling in your life as the combination of good and evil could be.” We are deceived when we place a value on something when, in fact, that value does not exist.

The story of Adam and Eve and the entrance of sin into the world bring up some very important questions about the nature of temptation. Just what is temptation? Is it wrong (sinful) to be tempted, or is it only wrong when we yield? How does desire come into the equation? Was Jesus tempted exactly as we are tempted or did he have some extra armor to protect him from temptation, or to keep him from yielding because, after all he was the Son of God? Can there be such a thing as temptation without desire playing a part? Are some desires in themselves sinful? What is the meaning of Hebrews 4:15 which states that we have a high priest, Jesus Christ, “who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin.”

Probably each of us has had a variety of temptations to do some pretty bad things, which is another way of saying that we had the desire to do those wrong things. After all, the word temptation necessarily involves desire. If there is no desire, there is no temptation. See James 1:14-15 where the author states, “each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” If I have no desire to get drunk, there is no temptation to get drunk. If, on the other hand I really want to get drunk, have a strong desire to get drunk, then temptation is certainly present. I may weigh the consequences, guilt, problems, etc., and decide not to yield, but the temptation and desire are tantamount to each other.

This brings up a very knotty problem about the temptations of Jesus. Did he really have a desire to change the stones into bread? See Matthew 4:1-4. He had fasted for 40 days, and was hungry and thirsty. To say he had no desire to do what the Devil challenged him with is to take away the essence of temptation. We must remember that he was “tempted in every way, just as we are.” This is difficult for many people to accept, because the divinity of Jesus gets in the way of our accepting his humanity. The great truth in all of this is that he never yielded. It is not the temptation that is wrong, but the yielding which constitutes the sin.

Another component of the sin of Adam and Eve was their abdication of personal responsibility. After the consequence became apparent, Adam blamed both God and Eve by saying, “The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” Perhaps we could paraphrase it like this. “It really isn’t my fault God, because it would never have happened if you had not given me such a weak person to live with. Why did you not give me a more considerate, more insightful woman to be my wife?” This sounds a bit like contemporary society doesn’t it? Then of course the woman blamed the serpent. “God why did you make that serpent such a crafty animal in the first place? Didn’t you know he would try to deceive us?” This reminds one of the trite sentence, “The Devil made me do it,” which is more serious than the use of the phrase implies.

Evil almost always masquerades itself as having a great deal to offer. Happiness, prosperity, pleasure, excitement, etc., are really the pursuits of most of us. There is nothing necessarily wrong with these. Evil is very attractive, as Moses discovered. Hebrews 11:25 tells us of Moses’ choice to suffer ill treatment with the people of God than “to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.” Yes, sin is frequently pleasurable, fun, exciting, and desirable. But as Proverbs says concerning too much wine, “In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper.” Proverbs 23:32.

We cannot leave this discussion of Adam and Eve without mentioning the popular doctrines of original sin. These vary from one religious group to another. Catholicism teaches that the guilt of Adam’s sin is transmitted to all of his progeny. A baby therefore is born in a state of guilt, and must be baptized (sprinkled) in order to remove that guilt. Protestantism is divided in its view of original sin. Although it is not propagated very strongly today, there is the teaching of total infant depravity as a result of Adam’s sin.

This means that nothing that the “sinner” can do is righteous in God’s sight, and consequently he cannot exercise such desirable virtues as faith or repentance. This necessitates a direct act of God through the Holy Spirit to convert him to Christ. Once this takes place, he belongs to God, and in the minds of some, he can never fall away from this relationship. Other Protestants believe that children are born in sin, but if they die before they reach an accountable age they are regenerated by God and saved. Various other forms of the teaching of original inherited sin exist. Most of these fail to note the difference between inherited guilt, and inherited consequences. Because of the life of a drunkard father, his family may suffer severe consequences, but are certainly not involved in the guilt of his sins. In the nature of things, sin’s guilt cannot be inherited. We all live with the consequences of Adam’s sin, but we are not born with his guilt.

The Problem of Evil and Suffering

In our world, evil exists along with good. Sometimes even good deeds bring about suffering. Look at Job or Jesus, or Paul, or any of the other apostles. On the other hand, at times evil people prosper while it seems that good people suffer. Is there a reasonable answer to the problem? The short answer is “No,” and perhaps that should be the long answer as well. There have been attempts to decipher this mystery, but all of them fall short of a reasonable and theologically sound answer. Some would refer us to the book of Job for the solution, but that book doesn’t really deal with the problem of the relationship of evil and suffering, if such a specific relationship actually exists. Job’s suffering was a vehicle for the author to teach us about the sovereignty of God, particularly as brought out in chapters 38 through 42. No attempt is made to explain why the righteous suffer unjustly, or why the wicked prosper. This was a basic mistake made by Job’s friends. The fact is that the Bible does not give us any explanation concerning why a just and merciful God allows the good and innocent to suffer. Was Job fully compensated? Not really. Although his material wealth was doubled, and friends and family brought him gold and silver, the loss of his children was not really compensated by the production of another seven sons and three daughters to replace the ones he had lost.

In some cases, probably a relatively few cases, it is certain that specific evil deeds have resulted in demonstrably bad consequences and specific good deeds have resulted in favorable consequences. However the Bible does not show a necessary correlation between the two sides of this complex equation. Natural catastrophes, hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, and the like are thought by some to have been brought on a city or nation because God was angry with them over their sins and the Bible sometime refers to such events in that way. Examples of this are the captivities of Israel and Judah by Assyria and Babylon. However, there is no indication that every catastrophe is (was) brought about by God in order to punish evil people. Perhaps our overwhelming desire to see evil properly punished has led to some of these conclusions. These kinds of explanations overlook the innocent suffering with the guilty, and a multitude of other complex problems involved in suffering. Since the Bible does not address these issues, it is best that we not try to explain this infinite problem with finite reasoning, lest we fall into the same error as Job’s friends.

Chapter V

Abraham and the Covenant

Genesis 11:27—12:9, 15:1-16, 16:1-16, 17:1-26,
18:16—19:38, 21:1-21, 22:1-18

Introduction

In Genesis 12 God spoke to Abraham saying that he should leave his father's household and go to a land which God would show him. The ultimate purpose of this was that through Abraham "all people on earth will be blessed." (Gen. 12:1-3) This is generally referred to as "The call of Abraham." It is the pivotal point in Bible history. If we do not grasp this, the rest of the Bible will make very little sense, other than the fact that it is a brief historical account of a small nation of enslaved people who finally settled in Palestine.

From Genesis 12 through the remainder of the Old Testament, and into the first part of the New Testament – Acts 10 – the Bible deals almost exclusively with Abraham's descendants through Isaac and Jacob. The three great patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and ultimately the nation of Israel, are the people we see in this history. But history is not the primary goal of the Old Testament, nor is its goal morality or ethical teaching, although these are important components which contribute to the real goal. Instead, the dominant theme is the interaction of God working in the history of his covenant people (Israel) in order to bring to fruition his work of salvation in Christ. Paul refers to this idea as God's eternal purpose in Christ. See in Ephesians 3:7-12. The foundation of this "eternal purpose" is laid out for us in the call of Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3.

In the closing verses of Genesis 11 we are told that Terah, the father of Abraham (at that time he was called Abram), moved his family out of Ur of Chaldea to Haran, a city in the extreme northern part of modern day Syria or perhaps on the southern border of Turkey. Its exact location has not been firmly established. Abraham's father died in Haran, and God told Abraham to leave his father's country and go to a land which God would show him. From the account in Acts 7:2 Stephen speaks of this call as having been first given to Abraham while he was still living in Ur of Chaldea. It is interesting that the account in Genesis 12:1 says that "the Lord *had* said to Abram . . ." indicating that this event had originated earlier. Although there was a widespread movement of people from Mesopotamia to Palestine during this period of time, Abraham's migration was not just a part of that movement, but was in response to God's directive.

From this point forward, the Old Testament deals with Abraham's descendants in a special way. The religious significance of Abraham's migration is seen in the fact that he built altars all along the way. At this time Abraham was 75 years old, and God's promise is confusing to say the least.

The "Call of Abraham" has a number of important elements in it. First, he is told to leave his father's house, his kindred, and his own land and go to another country which God would show him. Next in the promise was that God would make a great nation of Abra-

ham's descendants. In addition, God would bless him, and would make his name great. Those who blessed Abraham would be blessed, and those who cursed him would be cursed. Finally God told him that all people on earth would be blessed through him. Names were of particular importance among the ancient people, and God promised that Abraham's name would be great. Abraham took his wife Sarah (known as Sarai at this time) and his nephew Lot along on the journey. In Genesis 12:7 God told Abraham he would give the land to his offspring, and in Genesis 12:14, after his separation from Lot, the promise is repeated, adding that his offspring would be as numerous as the dust of the earth. It should be remembered that his wife Sarah was barren (Genesis 11:30). Later Abraham perceived this as an important obstacle in the fulfillment of God's promise.

Lot, Abraham's nephew, was captured in a war (Gen. 14) and Abraham mustered his own forces to rescue him. When he was returning from this successful rescue he encountered an otherwise unknown character named Melchizedek, who is referred to as a "priest of God and king of Salem." Melchizedek blessed Abraham and Abraham gave him a tenth of the spoil he had taken when he rescued Lot from his captors. This event is used by the writer of Hebrews in his discussion of the High Priesthood of Jesus. See Hebrews 5:1-12 and 7:1-28.

Once again God spoke to Abraham. His response to God was that he had no heir, and his servant Eliezer, a Syrian, would inherit his estate. At this point God assured Abraham that he would be the father of a son who would be his heir, and once again God reminds him that his progeny would be as numerous as the stars of the heavens. (Gen. 15) The Genesis writer observes that "Abram believed the Lord and he credited it to him as righteousness," a statement which Paul uses effectively in Romans to demonstrate the character of justification by faith.

Abraham and Hagar

Since no children were born to Abraham and Sarah, she asked her husband to father a child with Hagar, her Egyptian servant, and in this way a family would be raised through a surrogate. According to secular law and custom the offspring of the surrogate would, in fact, become heir of the father. As strange as this appears to us, it was not an unusual occurrence among some ancient cultures, and was a perfectly legal procedure.

The discovery of the Nuzi tablets (mentioned in Chapter I) confirms this kind of arrangement, and they give certain regulations concerning it, particularly if the barren wife later had a child of her own. Nuzi was an ancient city of Mesopotamia which flourished from about 2000 B.C. until 1000 B.C. The site is 10 miles (16 kilometers) southwest of Kirkuk, Iraq, east of the Tigris River, in the northern part of modern day Iraq. Although Nuzi is not mentioned in the Bible, it is of great archaeological importance. It was excavated in 1925-31 by the American School of Oriental Research. That expedition resulted in the discovery of some 20,000 small clay tablets inscribed with cuneiform writing. Although most of the tablets deal with events and regulations of the fifteenth century B.C., some of these tablets date back as far as 2500 B.C.

The Nuzi Tablets contain private contracts and public records, a list of goods which the city and the surrounding land produced, as well as tablets dealing with a wide range of other topics. They describe an ancient civilization, perhaps partly contemporary with Abraham, in which installment buying was widely practiced. See Nelson's *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Copyright (c)1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers or other Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias for additional details.

As we might anticipate, Hagar's pregnancy created a great deal of jealousy between her and Sarah, causing Hagar to flee. An angel instructed her to return, and promised that her child, soon to be born, would become the father of a great nation of people, but that he would be as a wild donkey among people, experiencing hostility on every hand. Abraham was eighty-six years old when Hagar's son, Ishmael, was born.

The Covenant of Circumcision

Thirteen years after the birth of Ishmael, God gave the covenant of circumcision to Abraham. He also changed his name from Abram (meaning exalted father) to Abraham (meaning father of many). Sarah's name was also changed from Sarai to Sarah, but there does not seem to be a difference in meaning of the two names.

The covenant of circumcision required that every male child, whether of Abraham's fleshly descent, those born in his household, or an indentured servant in his house, had to be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. Any violation of this would result in that person being cut off from his people. Going back to the twelfth chapter of Genesis we see the promise of God to Abraham building, as it is renewed and augmented at various times. This process of development reaches a climax in Genesis 17 with the covenant of circumcision. At this time Abraham circumcised all the males in his household including Ishmael, who at this time was thirteen years old.

The promise of many descendants coming of Abraham is restated here, twenty-four years after it was originally given. Abraham, understandably, asked God for Ishmael to be the one through whom the promise would be fulfilled, but God assured him that his wife Sarah would bear a son, even though she would be ninety years old and Abraham one hundred years old.

Although the practice of circumcision of all male children had a special significance to Abraham, and later to the nation of Israel, it was already a widespread practice among many, though not all, of Israel's neighbors. Among the Europeans and East Asians it was almost unknown. This may account for the fact that later the Philistines, originating probably from Crete or the Greek Islands, were disparagingly referred to by the Israelites as "the uncircumcised." The practice was prevalent among the Egyptians, Canaanites, and Arabs, but its significance for Israel was that it was a mark in the flesh of their relationship to God. By the time of the Babylonian Exile, and on into the New Testament this rite received excessive emphasis, and became a sort of substitute for a godly life.

Lot and the Destruction of Sodom

In Gen. 18 we are told about three men who came to Abraham as visitors from God. When they spoke about Sarah's having a child in the near future, she laughed inside her tent, and they chided her for not believing the promise of God. Abraham was told of God's plan to destroy the city of Sodom because of its extreme wickedness. Abraham pled with God concerning Sodom, apparently because of Lot's presence in the city. However, Sodom was destroyed but Lot, his wife and two daughters escaped. As they were fleeing, Lot's wife looked back at the destruction and became a pillar of salt. Lot and his daughters fled to a cave near Zoar, a small town at the south end of the Dead Sea. The location of Sodom is not certain, but it is generally believed to have been near Zoar.

Lot's daughters were unmarried, and they feared they would die without having borne children, thus effectively ending the family line. They planned an incestuous relationship with their father by getting him drunk on successive nights, and each of them bore a son from these relationships. The older daughter named her son Moab, and he became the father of the nation of Moab. His descendants settled on the southeastern side of the Dead Sea, which is part of modern day Jordan. The younger daughter also bore a son who was given the name Ben-Ammi. He became the father of the Ammonite nation and they settled east of the Jordan River just north of Moab. This is also part of the modern day country of Jordan.

Isaac and the Covenant

Isaac seems to play only an intermediate role, or a link between Abraham and Jacob. Relatively little is known of Isaac's life in comparison to that of Abraham and Jacob. When Abraham was one hundred years old and his wife Sarah ninety years old, Isaac was born (Gen. 21). At the time of the weaning of Isaac, Abraham gave a great feast. This type of celebration was common among the ancients. Small children were nursed by their mothers for a longer period of time than contemporary mothers would nurse their children. Since the infant mortality rate in the ancient world was high, weaning was a time for celebration, recognizing that the child had survived to an age where his chances of growing into adulthood were substantially heightened. At the time of the weaning of Isaac, Sarah observed Ishmael (Hagar's son) mocking Isaac. She was infuriated at this and demanded that Abraham send Hagar and Ishmael away. It should be noticed that Sarah's announced motivation for this expulsion was that "the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac." (Gen. 21:10)

Once again, the Nuzi Tablets confirm this as an accepted legal practice of that time. The legal customs provided that in the case where a surrogate was used to produce a child, but the legal wife later bore a child she was allowed to expel the surrogate and her child. According to the laws at that time, the father of the child born to the surrogate could have declared the slave woman to be free, and her son then could have become a legitimate heir with the son of the lawful wife. If a surrogate and her son were expelled, this could not be done. The Nuzi Tablets show that certain provisions had to be made for the safety and care of the expelled mother and her child. The Genesis account however, does not

speak of these provisions. Since Ishmael was thirteen years old at the time of the covenant of circumcision, this would mean that at the time of the weaning of Isaac and the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, Ishmael would probably have been in his middle to late teens. From the time of the birth of Isaac forward, the Genesis narrative centers on Isaac and his descendants, while Ishmael and his descendants are mentioned only a few times.

One of the most familiar incidents in the life of Abraham was his willingness to offer Isaac, his son, as a sacrifice to God. The details are found in Genesis 22:1-19. It is introduced by the statement that “God tested Abraham.” The demonstration of Abraham’s faith became a source of inspiration for an active obedient faith among the Hebrews and Christians as well. In the New Testament James calls attention to the fact that Abraham’s willingness to obey God, even in the face of committing a grossly immoral act, demonstrates the power of his faith. James recalls the statement from Genesis 15:6 when it was said that Abraham “believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.” This was made at the time God restated his covenant with Abraham. (See James 2:21-24.) The entire fourth chapter of Romans is Paul’s discussion of Abraham’s faith, using it in a different sense from that employed by James. The writer of Hebrews calls attention to a number of illustrations of Abraham’s faith, climaxing them with the incident concerning Abraham’s willingness to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. See Heb. 11:8-19.

Chapter VI

The Family of Jacob

Gen. 25:12-34, 29:1—30:24, 37:1-36, 39:1-23,
41:1-49, 45:1—46:7

Introduction

Sarah died and was buried in the Cave of Machpelah, near Hebron. Abraham remarried, and became the father of a group of sons, one of whom was named Midian. He became the father of a nation of people known as the Midianites. They settled in an area north-east of the modern day Gulf of Aqabah. During much of their history they were enemies of the Israelites.

When Isaac was about 40 years old, Abraham's chief servant, no doubt Eliezer, was sent to Paddan Aram to seek a wife for Isaac. This is an area located in the northeastern part of modern day Syria where Abraham's father Terah had settled. Many of his descendents had remained there, although Abraham left and settled in Canaan. Isaac's wife-to-be was Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel, the son Nahor, Abraham's brother. When Eliezer announced his mission to the family of Bethuel, Rebekah was willing to leave her home and go to Canaan to marry Isaac. Abraham died at the age of 175, and was also buried in the Cave of Machpelah where Sarah had been buried.

Isaac, Rebekah, Esau and Jacob

In time, Rebekah became pregnant, but she had difficulties with her pregnancy. She took her troubles to God who told her that she would have twins, and they would be the progenitors of two nations which would be in conflict with each other. An interesting statement is made here that "the older will serve the younger." Gen. 25:23. Although Esau was born first, Jacob became the one through whom God would bring about his promise. In Romans 9:12, Paul calls attention to the fact that God made this sovereign choice, although it seems to be somewhat arbitrary to us.

Through trickery and deceit Jacob stole the birthright from Esau. Later, when Isaac was growing old and blind, he was preparing to give the patriarchal blessing to Esau, the older of the twins. Once again Jacob used trickery and deceit, this time to steal the patriarchal blessing. The practice of patriarchal blessing from an elderly father to his sons was prevalent in ancient times, but here it seems to have a prophetic ring, and was so understood by the family, and certainly by the author of the account. In Romans Paul calls attention to this important act. The descendants of Esau settled in Sier, an area south of the Dead Sea, and they became known as the Edomites. They were in frequent conflict with the nation of Israel.

Jacob in Paddan Aram

Upon discovering what Jacob had done, Esau vowed to kill him. Jacob fled to Paddan Aram, the general area where the family of Terah (Abraham's father) had settled after

they came out of Ur of Chaldea. Jacob, while journeying toward Paddan Aram, arrived in Bethel. God appeared to him in a dream, renewing to him the promise which he had made to Abraham and Isaac. Upon his arrival in Paddan Aram Jacob met Rachel, the daughter of Laban, who was the son of Bethuel and grandson of Nahor, Abraham's brother. This meant that Jacob and Rachel were cousins. He was invited to stay with the family, and he worked for Laban his uncle.

Jacob's marriages

Jacob wanted to marry Rachel, and agreed to work for Laban for seven years for this privilege. (Gen. 29) After the seven years had passed the anticipated wedding took place. However, her father secretly put Leah, his older daughter, in place of Rachel. Since women were completely veiled in those days, Jacob was unaware of this deception, not discovering the trickery until the next morning. Laban explained that it is not customary for the younger daughter to marry first. Jacob agreed to serve Laban for another seven years for the right to marry Rachel, but after just one week he was allowed to marry her. He fulfilled his obligation to work for Laban for seven more years.

Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, but Rachel could not have children. The account indirectly indicates that Leah realized that Rachel was the favorite wife, and competition developed between the women and ultimately between their sons. Leah gave birth to four sons, hoping this would cultivate Jacob's love. Instead, it aggravated the feelings of jealousy and conflict between the two wives. The women began using various means to gain Jacob's favor.

Since Rachel could not bear children, she gave Bilhah, her maidservant to Jacob as a surrogate through whom she could raise a child. According to the laws of that day (see the Nuzi Tablets), this surrogate arrangement was a legally recognized right of a wife who could not bear children, similar to the situation with Sarah, Hagar, and Abraham. Bilhah gave birth to two sons. Leah stopped conceiving, so she gave Zilpa, her maidservant to Jacob to raise another child. In time, Zilpa gave birth to two sons.

About the time of the wheat harvest Reuben, Leah's oldest son, found some mandrake plants while he was in the field, and brought them to his mother. Rachel asked for some of the mandrakes. In the ancient world it was thought that by eating the berry and root of the plant a woman could increase her fertility. Leah gave birth to two more sons, and a daughter. Her daughter does not play a prominent role in the history of the family. Finally, Rachel gave birth to a son whom they named Joseph. Because of Jacob's love for Rachel, and the fact that Joseph was the son of his old age, Jacob was partial to Joseph, predictably creating jealousy among the brothers. Ultimately Joseph plays a pivotal role in the history of the family and the Israelite nation.

Jacob and His Family Return to Canaan.

Jacob was very successful in managing the flocks of Laban his father-in-law, and in the process he himself became very wealthy. This created a considerable amount of jealousy

between Jacob and Laban and Laban's sons who accused Jacob of dishonesty with the flock. These conflicts caused Jacob to decide to take his entire family and all their goods, and return to Canaan. (Gen. 31-33) They left secretly at night, and had been gone for three days before Laban discovered their departure. He immediately pursued them. At the time they left, Rachel stole her father's household god (the teraphim), and took it with her, although Jacob was not aware of what had taken place. This theft was significant, because it was generally believed that the one who possessed the teraphim would have the blessings of the deity it represented, and may also have control of the family estate. It was therefore both a religious and financial problem for Laban. Although a search was conducted, Rachel had sufficiently hidden it so that it was not discovered. This incident seems to indicate that Laban's family may have been polytheistic, or at least held to some form of idolatry.

As they approached home territory, Jacob divided his household into two groups, fearing that his brother Esau might still hold a grudge against him, and might kill some of the family. Jacob sent each group away in opposite directions while he remained alone. During the night a man came to him, and Jacob wrestled with him all night. Jacob prevailed against the man, but his adversary touched his thigh and injured it. At daybreak he realized this man was a messenger from God, an angel. At this time the angel changed Jacob's name to Israel, although he is still generally referred to as Jacob. The name Jacob means, "one who grabs the heel" – figuratively, one who deceives – a reminder that when the twin boys were born, Jacob's hand was grasping the heel of Esau. The name Israel means, "one who struggles with God."

When Jacob returned, his brother, Esau, greeted him graciously, but Jacob continued his journey southward to settle near Shechem, roughly 50 miles north of Jebus, (the town which was later called Jerusalem). A short time later he moved a little further south to Bethel, continuing down to the vicinity of Bethlehem (Ephrath). On the way, Rachel died giving birth to another son whom Jacob named Benjamin.

Jacob's family had many internal conflicts, including the intense jealousy of the brothers against Joseph. This fact becomes very important as the family history develops. The twelve sons of Jacob became the heads of twelve clans of people, finally known as the twelve tribes of Israel.

From this point to the close of Genesis (Gen. 37, 39-50), the story of Jacob's family centers on Joseph, the son of Jacob and Rachel. The story of Joseph is second only to that of Abraham in the extent of coverage given in Genesis. The events of Joseph's life demonstrate how God worked in history, using the free choices of Joseph, his hostile brothers, Pharaoh, Jacob and others in order to bring about the Lord's own sovereign purposes.

Joseph's dreams

The favored status of Joseph aggravated his brothers, who seem to have a deep seated disdain for him. (Gen. 37) When he was 17 years old Joseph had two dreams. In one he dreamed that he and his brothers were in the field harvesting grain, and the sheaves of the

brothers all bowed down to Joseph's sheaf. In a second dream he saw the sun, moon, and 11 stars bowing down to him. Needless to say, the brothers reacted angrily to these dreams.

When the brothers were tending their flocks near Dothan, Jacob sent Joseph to see how they were getting along. When he approached they plotted to kill him, but Reuben, the oldest of the brothers, opposed it saying they should throw him into a dry cistern. Reuben planned to rescue Joseph and send him back to his father. While Reuben was away, a caravan destined for Egypt came by, and the brothers decided to sell Joseph as a slave to the Ishmaelites for 20 pieces of silver. Joseph's coat, which had been given to him by his father, was dipped in the blood of a goat, and the brothers presented it to Jacob with the request that he examine it to see if it was Joseph's coat. Jacob concluded that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. For 22 years Jacob believed Joseph was dead. Joseph, upon his arrival in Egypt, was sold to Potiphar, captain of the guard for King Pharaoh, and he became Potiphar's household servant.

The Hyksos Invasion of Egypt

Foreigners, called the Hyksos, came from western Asia, Syria, and Canaan and infiltrated Egypt. Although the Bible does not give an account of these events, they play a very significant role in the history of Israel while they were in Egypt as slaves. Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian, believed the word "Hyksos" referred to "shepherd kings," but this has now been shown to be an erroneous interpretation and the word "Hyksos" is generally understood as an Egyptian word meaning "rulers of foreign lands." The Hyksos were a mixed race of Semite and Asiatic ethnicity. They slowly infiltrated Egypt and by about 1720 B.C. (roughly 20 years prior to Joseph's arrival), they had become strong enough to take over the government of Lower (northern) Egypt. It should be noted that the northern portion of Egypt is referred to as Lower Egypt, and the southern part is referred to as Upper Egypt. This is due to the topography of the land, and the Nile flows from south to north.

The Hyksos Empire stretched from Egypt to Syria, and their rulership covered a period from about 1720 until 1550 B.C., roughly 170 years. Their expulsion by the native Egyptians, led by Ahmose I (also spelled Amosis), was the beginning of what historians have called the New Kingdom. Chronologists differ regarding these exact dates, some believing that the Hyksos domination of Egypt began about 1630 B.C., and ended about 1521 B.C. This would mean that the Hyksos domination lasted about 109 years. This and other factors also lead to a different calculation for the date of the exodus and other events in early Israelite history. The evidence for each of these chronologies is insufficient to offer definite conclusions.

These Hyksos invaders introduced horses and chariots as new war implements which had not been part of the Egyptian arsenal. Archaeological discoveries have shown that, once the Hyksos were firmly established, they adopted Egyptian customs and took Egyptian names and dress. They brought increased economic prosperity and international trade to Egypt, but in spite of this they were generally hated by the native Egyptian population.

The capital of the Hyksos/Egyptian Empire was Avaris (also known as Tanis), located in the northeastern Nile delta region of northern Egypt, near Goshen where the family of Jacob later settled. Prior to the Hyksos invasion the Egyptian capital had been Thebes, in Upper (southern) Egypt, and when the Hyksos were expelled the capital was returned to Thebes. Upper Egypt was under the domination of the Hyksos, but it was given more autonomy than the Lower (northern) sector.

As stated above, Joseph probably came to Egypt about 1700 B.C., or shortly after the Hyksos invasion. The king of Egypt “who did not know about Joseph” (Exodus 1:8) is introduced at the opening of the book of Exodus and was possibly the Egyptian king Ahmose I, who had led the native Egyptians in the expulsion of the Hyksos. He became founder of the 18th Dynasty referred to as Egypt’s “New Kingdom.” The fact that there are almost no written records of this period is understandable because this was a humiliating century and a half for Egypt, and is sometimes referred to as Egypt’s Dark Ages. The Hyksos are known to have left few records of their rulership, and most of what we know about them comes from Josephus.

The fact that the Hyksos were Semitic/Asiatic kings in Egypt may have made Joseph’s situation more favorable. There was frequent movement of bedouins and others between Canaan and Egypt during the Hyksos domination. Remember, Joseph and finally the family of Jacob came to Egypt during the Hyksos domination of the country. Archaeologists have uncovered many Semitic names among the Hyksos, lending credence to the favorable treatment of Joseph and the family of Jacob when they came to Egypt, since they also were also Semites. Canaanite and other Palestinian influence in architecture, pottery, and burial practices has been uncovered by archaeologists as late as the 1960’s. In the Egyptian revolution of 1570 B.C. Ahmose I (1539-1514 B.C.) expelled the Hyksos, chasing them back into Canaan, and destroying some Canaanite cities (*e.g.* Shechem) in the process. As stated above, the chronological schema is not certain, and some scholars differ with the above chronological analysis.

Joseph in Egypt

As mentioned above, Joseph was purchased by Potiphar, captain of the guard for Pharaoh. He was an excellent servant, and Potiphar turned over the entire operation of his household to Joseph. Potiphar’s wife was attracted to Joseph, and attempted to seduce him. Joseph fled however, and the humiliated wife told her husband that Joseph had attempted to rape her. Potiphar had Joseph thrown into prison.

Some have attempted to show similarities in the story of Joseph and Potiphar with the non-Biblical Egyptian story, “The Tale, of Two Brothers.” There are similarities, but it seems to be somewhat fanciful to suppose that there is any kind of dependency or relationship here. In the Egyptian story, two brothers lived together. The older brother was married, and his younger brother worked for him keeping his flocks. The wife of the older brother attempted to seduce the younger brother, but he ran away, not telling his brother what had happened. The humiliated wife showed her husband her self-inflicted bruises, accusing the younger brother of attempted rape, and his brutality against her. The old-

er brother vowed to kill his younger brother, but finally believed his brother was innocent. Instead, he returned to the house and killed his wife. A group of mythological stories is also connected to this, having to do with the intervention of the gods, the removal of one brother's heart, and other fanciful events.

While in prison, Joseph was an exemplary prisoner, and became a trusted inmate. Two other prisoners are mentioned, one the chief cupbearer (butler), and the other the chief baker of the king. A cupbearer was more than just a slave in the royal court, but was thought of as a trusted servant who served wine to the king. He was sometimes required to drink a portion of the wine before serving it to be sure it had not been poisoned. Because of this trusted position, he could become a close associate of the king.

Each of these two royal prisoners had dreams. The cupbearer (chief butler), in his dream, saw three branches with clusters of grapes. He pressed the grapes into a cup and served the wine to the king. Joseph's interpretation was that in three days the butler would be returned to his duties in the king's court. Joseph asked the butler to remember him to the king, because he was in prison on a false charge. The butler was indeed restored to his position, but for two years he did not mention Joseph to the king. The chief baker dreamed of three baskets on his head, each with baked breads of all sorts. Birds came and ate the bread out of the baskets. Joseph's interpretation of the dream was that in three days the baker would be hanged, and the birds will come and eat his flesh. This dream also came true.

About two years later King Pharaoh had two dreams, but none of his magicians could interpret them. The butler remembered Joseph's interpretation of his dream in prison, and the king sent for Joseph. Pharaoh had dreamed of seven full sheaves of grain being consumed by seven poor sheaves, but the poor sheaves remained poor. Then he dreamed of seven healthy cows which were consumed by seven lean cows, yet the lean cows remained lean. Joseph's interpretation was that there would be seven very productive years in Egypt, to be followed by seven years of famine both in Egypt and surrounding countries.

Joseph was thirty years old when he interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh (Gen. 41:46), meaning that thirteen years had passed since he was sold as a slave into Egypt. Add the seven productive years to this and we see that Joseph was about thirty-seven years old when the famine began, and a little over thirty-seven years old when his brothers came to purchase grain in Egypt.

Meanwhile back in Canaan Jacob's family was suffering from the famine, not knowing anything about Pharaoh's dream or Joseph's role. When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent his sons (except Benjamin) to Egypt to buy grain. They had to buy the grain from Joseph, although they did not recognize him at the time. Joseph, however, recognized them. He inquired about their family, and instructed them to bring their younger brother with them at the time of their next purchase. When they returned home, they found that their money had been placed back in their sacks.

On their second visit they brought Benjamin, in spite of Jacob's fears about his safety. After a series of dramatic incidents, Joseph disclosed his true identity to his brothers, resulting in the entire household of Jacob coming to Egypt. They were given the land of Goshen as a place to settle. This is an area in the Nile delta region of Egypt. Jacob died in Egypt, and his body was taken back to Canaan for burial. The brothers feared that Joseph would avenge his treatment by them, but Joseph said, "You intended harm to me, but God intended it for good." Genesis 50:19-20. Joseph lived to be 110 years old, which, by Egyptian tradition, was considered the ideal lifespan. Shortly before his own death, Joseph requested that his body be taken back to Canaan for burial at the time when the Israelites would escape from their slavery in Egypt.

Chapter VII

Moses and the Enslavement of Israel

Exodus 1:1—2:10, 3:1-10, 5:1-21, 7:1-13,
12:1-42, 13:1—14:31

Introduction

The account of the death of Joseph brings the book of Genesis to an end. The remaining part of the Pentateuch, Exodus through Deuteronomy, deals with the deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt and the giving of the Law of Moses which plays a major role in the history of the Israelites. Two pivotal points in their history are inseparably linked. These are the exodus – the escape from Egyptian slavery – and the covenant given at Mt. Sinai, the Law of Moses or Torah as it is called.

The Pharaohs and Egyptian Religion

We might ask, “What was the religious and political climate like in Egypt during the time of the enslavement of the Hebrews?” We cannot cover this in very much detail, but a few significant factors are offered in order to give a glimpse into the background of the Biblical narrative.

Egypt was a land of many gods. Even the Pharaohs were considered divine in some cases. Nature gods occupied a prominent place in Egyptian thought, and were usually represented by animals (particularly bulls), birds, and reptiles (particularly the cobra). The Nile River, because of its importance to the economy, and even the survival of Egypt, was thought to have been controlled by the gods, as were most other forces of nature.

If the Egyptians could be thought of as having a national deity, that god would be Amon, sometime referred to as Amun. The power of Amon’s priests was, at times, considered a threat even to the power of the Pharaoh. This threat prompted Amenhotep IV (1370-1353 B.C.) to declare Aton to be Egypt’s universal deity, giving practically no place at all for Amon. Some have thought that Amenhotep’s actions contained a glimpse of monotheism, but it is more likely that he was making a declaration of Aton to be the god whom the Egyptians were to worship rather than an advocacy of monotheism. Amenhotep was a very strong devotee of Aton, and changed his own name from Amenhotep to Akhenaton, meaning “one useful to Aton.” The sun disk was the symbol of Aton. He should not be confused with Re (also called Ra), the sun god who was long considered the head of the Egyptian pantheon. Actually, Re’s name was combined with Amon (the rival god of Aton) and the god became known as Amon-Re. There was, with the exception of Akhenaton’s devotion to Aton, generally great tolerance for variations and additions to the religious beliefs of the Egyptians.

The change in the religion of Egypt brought about by Akhenaton did not set well with most Egyptians, particularly the priests of the god Amon. Feeling the pressure of the hostile priests, Akhenaton moved his capital from Thebes, in Upper (southern) Egypt on

the Nile River, to a city which he named Akhetaton, meaning “the place of the effective glory of Aton.” This city was located about 200 miles south of modern day Cairo. Thebes, the former capital, was about 140 miles further south of Akhetaton. Today it is known as Tel el-Amarna. This whole series of events created very unsettled conditions in Egypt, and various rebellions resulted. Akhenaton died, or was assassinated in 1353 B.C. Remember that Joseph came to Egypt about 1700 B.C. and the family of Jacob followed about twenty-two years later. The exodus took place under Moses in about 1250 B.C. meaning that the Israelites were in Egypt from about 1700 B.C. until 1250 B.C. (450 years). They were there during the expulsion of the Hyksos by Ahmose I (1539-1514 B.C.) and the religious upheavals under Akhenaton (1370-1353 B.C.)

The time period from Akhenaton (1370-1353 B.C.) through the reign of King Tutankhamen (King Tut, 1332-1323 B.C.), is generally referred to as the Amarna age of Egyptian history. During part of this chaotic period Akhenaton spent an inordinate amount of time with his devotion to Aton, neglecting many of the affairs of state, particularly in the outlying areas of his domain of which Canaan was a part. Many letters were exchanged between the “foreign offices” of Egypt and Canaan as well as some other areas. A group of marauders of various nationalities made up a significant part of these rebellions. These people were referred to as the Habiru, and, at one time, some scholars thought they were primarily the Hebrews. This however, has been shown to be erroneous. Actually the Habiru were people of various ethnic backgrounds who were scattered over the ancient Middle East. This term, as it appears in the correspondence between Canaanite nations and Egypt, is used in a somewhat derogatory way, loosely meaning foreigners.

In 1887, while digging in the ruins of Amarna, a peasant woman accidentally discovered a group of clay tablets written in cuneiform script. Almost 300 of these letters were discovered, and are now in museums in Cairo, Berlin, and London. These letters gave archaeologists excellent information concerning the political, economic, military, and social conditions in Egypt and Canaan during the fourteenth century B.C. An interesting phenomenon is that these letters show that the cuneiform script was not confined to Mesopotamia, but was used in diplomatic correspondence between nations outside of Mesopotamia.

King Akhenaton, mentioned above was married to Nefertiti, noted in history for her beauty. Tutankhamen, King Tut, (1332-1323 B.C.) was his son-in-law, or possibly a son by a minor wife. He became ruler of Egypt as a boy of about 9 years old, and died at age 18. Though not an important king, he brought a measure of glory to Egypt, and moved the capital back to Thebes. In spite of his short and youthful reign, he has become one of the most widely celebrated kings of Egypt. This is because of the discovery in 1922 of his very elaborate tomb almost completely intact. The entire second floor of the Egyptian Archaeological Museum is given over to artifacts from his reign.

The ancient Egyptians are well known for their belief in a life after death, and much of their religious and burial ceremonies emphasized preparation for the afterlife. In order to care for a person of nobility, servants were sometimes killed and buried along with the

noble so they could serve him in his next life. The pyramids and other elaborate tombs of Egypt (*e.g.* Tutankhamen) testify to this.

The Plight of the Hebrews in Egypt

Exodus 1:8 speaks of a new king arising to power “who did not know about Joseph.” Outside of the Bible there are no archaeological or historical references to Israel’s presence in Egypt until we get to the Stele of Merneptah, dated around 1220 B.C. This means that the information originated some years after the exodus of the Israelites. Even this reference though gives no definitive information about the Israelites. Pharaoh Merneptah (1224-1216 B.C.) was the son of Rameses II, who was probably the Pharaoh of the exodus. The Stele describes some of the victories of Merneptah, stating “Israel is laid waste, his seed is not.” The lack of information in Egyptian history and inscriptions concerning Israel’s sojourn in Egypt should not be reason for concern however. As previously stated, there are very few inscriptions of any kind from Egypt during the period of the Hyksos domination, and the ruins that exist are unimpressive.

But why were the Israelites enslaved in Egypt? Although the Bible gives very little information concerning the reasons for their enslavement the infiltration of the Hyksos, the chaotic religious and political upheavals during the reign of Akhenaton, merge with the Biblical information to give a little clearer picture. Probably these past experiences made the kings of the New Kingdom, the eighteenth dynasty suspicious of the growth of the Israelites population, seeing them as another threat to Egypt’s sovereignty. We do not know just when the oppression of Israel began, but Seti I (1305-1290 B.C.) is usually considered “the Pharaoh of the oppression” and his son, Rameses II (1290-1224) was probably the Pharaoh of the Exodus. However, as previously stated, the chronology of the period is not completely clear. It would probably have been during the reign of Seti I that Moses was born and raised in the courts of Egypt. This would also mean that he would have been in the family with Rameses II, Seti’s son and ultimate successor. With these factors present, the Israelites were reduced to slavery, and forced to make bricks and build two cities for Pharaoh, *i.e.* Pithom and Rameses. Bricks of Nile mud are still found in Egypt, and some ancient structures have been discovered showing bricks made with straw.

Pharaoh (probably Seti I) attempted reduce the Israelite threat by having the midwives kill all male babies at birth. During this time a son was born to two Israelites, Amram and Jochebed. This baby was Moses. The story of his birth and adoption by the Egyptian princess is well known. To protect their baby from Pharaoh’s decree, Amram and Jochebed hid him for three months. Then he was laid in a small basket and placed among the papyrus reeds of the Nile River. Miriam, the sister of the baby, was keeping a watchful eye out to see what would happen. See Exodus 2:4. Finally he was discovered by the king’s daughter. Miriam suggested to the princess that a Hebrew nurse be procured for him. She brought the baby’s own mother in for the task. The princess named him Moses for she said, “I drew him out of the water.” He was therefore raised with training in Egyptian culture and education, but was also brought up to know the God of Israel.

Moses and His Enslaved Countrymen

According to Stephen's statement in Acts 7:23 when Moses was about forty years old he went out to see the plight of his countrymen. When he observed an Israelite in conflict with an Egyptian slave-master he killed the Egyptian, and buried the corpse in the sand. The next day, he observed a quarrel between two Israelites and he tried to mediate the dispute, only to discover that his murder of the Egyptian was known. Pharaoh Seti I determined to kill Moses but he fled to Midian. Stephen, in his speech in Acts 7 divides Moses' early life into three segments of forty years each, referring to his time in the Egyptian courts, his time in Midian, and the period of the exodus. Deut. 34:7 tells us that Moses was one hundred-twenty years old when he died. We do not have information about Stephen's source for the age of Moses at the time he fled to Midian or his age when he returned to Egypt, but these were traditionally held by the Hebrews of Stephen's time. While in Midian, Moses married Zipporah, the daughter of Reuel, priest of Midian. Reuel is later referred to as Jethro. During Moses' time in Midian, Pharaoh Seti I died, and his son, Rameses II (1290-1224 B.C.) succeeded him. Remember, Moses was probably raised in the courts of Pharaoh Seti and Rameses was Seti's son and successor. This meant that Moses was probably raised with Rameses who was the Egyptian king whom Moses confronted when he returned from Midian.

Rameses became a notable builder, and was responsible for the construction of the great temple at Abu Simbel, located between the first and second cataracts on the Nile River, roughly 500 miles south of modern day Cairo. In about 1271 B.C., Rameses made a non-aggression treaty with Hattusili, king of the Hittite nation (c.1289-1265 B.C.). To seal the treaty Rameses gave his daughter in marriage to the king of the Hittites. This is believed to be history's first non-aggression treaty. The Hittites were a warlike Indo-European nation which occupied the central portion of modern day Turkey and were in constant conflict with Egypt over the domination of Syria and portions of Canaan. Outside of the Old Testament, almost nothing was known of the Hittites until 1907 when their capital city of Hattusha, was discovered. This site is located near the city of Boghazkoy, about 250 miles east of modern day Ankara, Turkey. It was not until the 1920's however that these discoveries were sufficiently evaluated that accurate information on the Hittites could be known. We need to remember that Rameses II is the Pharaoh with whom Moses was raised, and before whom Moses later appeared at the time of the exodus.

Moses and Pharaoh

While he was in Midian keeping the sheep of his father-in-law, Moses came near Mt. Sinai (Horeb) where he observed a bush which was burning, but not being consumed. When he turned aside to investigate it God spoke to him, instructing him to return to Egypt and appear before Pharaoh. Moses offered a variety of excuses concerning why he was not qualified to do it, but God answered each of the objections. He also promised Moses that he would be empowered to perform certain signs to demonstrate to Pharaoh that this was God's intervention. Moses met Aaron, his older brother, when he was returning to Egypt, and Aaron became his spokesman. The book of Exodus contains the

core events which defined Israel as a nation, and the people of God. Moses' appearance before Pharaoh forms the beginning of the exodus event.

After meeting with the Israelites, Moses presented himself to the king, first requesting that the people be allowed to go into the desert and celebrate a religious festival. When the request was denied, Pharaoh decided that the Israelites had too much time on their hands, and he retaliated by increasing their burdens, so that they were required to gather their own straw for the bricks, yet they had to maintain the same quota. The people turned against Moses accusing him of being responsible for their increased burdens. Moses and Aaron returned to Pharaoh a second time, and performed certain signs before him to show that this was the Lord's intervention. Still Pharaoh refused to allow the people to go.

Following Pharaoh's rejection a series of plagues were brought on Egypt. These have been variously "explained" by critics and friends alike as natural occurrences which were simply accentuated at this time. There could have been natural forces at work here, but the Biblical account represents these components as God's own intervention. Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he refused to let the people go. The plagues seem to be designed to demonstrate God's superiority over the inferior gods of Egypt. See Exodus 7:1-7. The plagues themselves are found in Exodus 7:14—10:29. The plagues attacked many of the entities which were sacred to the Egyptians.

The first plague was turning the waters of Egypt into blood. The Nile was considered sacred, and was even deified by the Egyptians because it was the core of their economy and sustenance. God turned it into blood in the presence of Pharaoh, and the streams and canals also became blood. Even the water in private homes became blood. Sea life in the River died, creating greater problems.

The second plague, a massive invasion of frogs, may be related to the first, in that it represents the frogs polluting the Nile. They were found everywhere. They died out at Moses' word, and the dead frogs were piled up and decayed. During some of the plagues Pharaoh said he would let the people go if Moses would entreat God to withdraw the plague. However, when the plague stopped, Pharaoh hardened his heart.

The third was a plague of gnats. Through many of the plagues Moses appealed to Pharaoh delivering God's words, "Let my people go." Up until this time the Egyptian magicians were imitating the marvels of Moses in various ways (Ex. 8:7), but with the plague of the gnats this ceased.

The plague of flies followed. With this plague the Israelites begin to be treated differently. They had no flies in their areas. Pharaoh agreed to allow the Israelites to go on a three days' journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to God. However, again he relented.

The fifth plague was a disease of the cattle and other domestic animals. Israel's animals were not affected by the disease however.

The sixth plague brought boils on humans and animals. The Exodus account specifically notes that even the magicians were powerless to protect themselves against the boils.

The seventh was a plague of hail. This plague was prefaced by God's declaration that he could have cut Pharaoh off at any time, but he acted in this way so that Pharaoh would know his power. God offered an escape from the hail if they would take their animals into a safe shelter. Pharaoh again hardened his heart.

The plague of locust was eighth in line. When Moses announced that this plague was to come, Pharaoh's servants advised the king to allow the Israelites to go sacrifice to God. Pharaoh recalled Moses and offered to allow the men only to go. Moses refused this, and the locusts were brought on the country as a result. They ate every green thing. Pharaoh confessed his sin, but later the Lord hardened his heart.

Next was the plague of darkness. This was called "thick darkness." Israel was protected from this. Once again Pharaoh's heart became hard.

The Last Plague and Institution of the Passover

Not only was the last plague the most severe, but it inaugurated the Passover, a feast of the Jews which became one of the most important events on the Hebrew calendar. This became the beginning month for the Israelites, Abib or Nisan, and it corresponds to our period of March-April. The Israelites were told to ask for gold, silver, and clothing from the Egyptians, who were, by this time, favorably disposed toward Israel. At midnight, the oldest child in every Egyptian household would die, and first born of the cattle as well.

The Israelites were told to follow specific instructions in order to be protected against this plague. On the tenth day of the first month each household was to set aside a male lamb or a goat, one year old, without blemish. On the fourteenth day the animal was to be killed, and his blood spread on the top and sides of the doorframes of each Israelite house. The lamb was then to be roasted, and the occupants of the house were to be dressed and ready to move out at the time they ate it. They were to eat it with bitter herbs and bread made without yeast. God said he would pass through the land of Egypt that night, and kill the firstborn of every Egyptian, but he said to Israel, "When I see the blood [on the doorframes] I will pass over you." This was referred to as the Passover, and it became one of Israel's most important celebrations. Later, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and dedication of the firstborn of humans and animals were tied to this. Pharaoh told Moses to take the people and leave.

The Exodus

The Israelites had been living in the Land of Goshen located in the Nile Delta region in northern Egypt (Gen. 45:10, 46:28). Two cities in this area, Pithom and Rameses (Raameses), had been built by Hebrews during their enslavement. Some historians have thought that the city of Avaris was the location of ancient Rameses but archaeological excavations in 1905-06 showed that this was incorrect. However, further archaeological

investigations showed that Rameses was very close to Avaris. At the time of the exodus the Israelites gathered at Rameses and moved southward and slightly east to Succoth, about 50 miles (80 km.) from Rameses. From Succoth they marched toward the Red Sea but God directed them to turn around and take another route. They encamped at Etham and other places, the locations of which are not definitely known. Pharaoh believed the escaping slaves were lost in the land, and he had his army pursued them. The Lord had done this by design however so that Pharaoh's army would pursue them and be destroyed. Israel encamped at Baal-Zephon.

The text speaks of the Israelites moving toward the Red Sea. This presents a practical problem concerning the identity and location of the Red Sea. The Red Sea, as it is identified today, is located at the merging of the south terminus of the Gulf of Suez to the west of the Sinai Peninsula and the south terminus of the Gulf of Aqaba to the east of the Sinai Peninsula. This means that the Red Sea, as it is identified today, is south of the Sinai Peninsula and it separates Africa from Arabia. It is possible that what we now call the Gulf of Suez was, in ancient times, considered part of the Red Sea. In Ex. 10:18-19, the plague of locust was brought to an end when Moses prayed to the Lord and a very strong wind caught up the locust and "carried them into the Red Sea." This is almost certainly speaking of what we now call the Gulf of Suez rather than the contemporary identification of the Red Sea which lies south of the Sinai Peninsula. See the map for the route of the exodus.



The Route of the Exodus

As stated above, the exodus began in the extreme northern part of Egypt where Israel lived – the Land of Goshen. They moved on to Baal Zephon which is directly west of the body of water known as the “Papyrus Lake” or the “Sea of Reeds.” In ancient times this could have been considered part of the Red Sea (which we call the Gulf of Suez). Israel came to the Red Sea (the Papyrus Lake) but when the people saw the armies of Pharaoh approaching they complained to Moses that he had brought them out, only to be killed by the Egyptians. The waters of the sea parted, Israel crossed on dry land, and the army of Pharaoh was destroyed when the parted waters flooded back over them.

After crossing the Red Sea, Israel moved to the south toward the foot of the Peninsula finally reaching Mt. Sinai. On the way they complained about lack of food and water. Manna, quail and water were provided by God. The first instance of observance of the Sabbath Day is recorded here when they were told to gather twice as much manna on the sixth day because no one was to gather any on the seventh day. It was to be a Sabbath. Observance of the Sabbath became one of the Ten Commandments.

Various explanations have been given to account for the presence of the manna. In this desert area in the morning some of the plants, particularly the tamarisk trees, exude an edible honey-like fluid and some believe this is the origin of the manna. Although this may have been a factor, the Bible represents the manna as a direct intervention of God since there would not have been sufficient tamarisk trees in the desert to provide food for so many people for so long a time (40 years). Later, when Israel came into Canaan and began to live off of the produce of the land, it was specifically stated that the manna ceased to be provided. See Joshua 5:12. The people continued to move southward until they arrived at Mt. Sinai where they encamped for a whole year.

Chapter VIII

The Covenant at Mt. Sinai

And

The Religion of Israel

Exodus 19:1—20:17, 21:12-36, 23:1-9,
Leviticus 11:1-12, 16:1-34, 18:1-30

Introduction

The formation of Israel's theocracy began in Exodus 19. It is here that we have the record of Israel's arrival at Mt. Sinai, and the beginning of the conversations of God with Moses concerning the covenant. Exodus 19:3-6 is of particular importance because in this passage Moses received certain foundation elements of the covenant as it was going to be presented to Israel. Verses 7 and 8 give the response of the people to the preliminary offer of God's covenant. The remainder of the chapter gives information concerning the people and priests. Since the Law of Moses had not yet been given, it is not clear just what was the origin of this priesthood or what its character might have been. The existence of priests among God's people, even before the Law was given, was not unheard of. In the days of Abraham, Melchizedek was referred to as a priest of God.

Israel was about to become a theocracy – a God-ruled nation. The law which would become their discipline is referred to as the Law, the Law of the Lord, the Law of Moses, the Law of God, and the Book of the Law. Most often it is simply called the Law. In it we see elements of civil and criminal law, moral and ethical rules, regulations on food and hygiene, and religious and ceremonial laws. These are combined into the conditions of God's covenant with Israel. From an Old Testament perspective it is not possible to separate the Covenant from the Law.

It should be noted that these laws, including the Ten Commandments, were given to the Israelites, not to all nations for all time. God dealt with other nations in a different way, but he chose to give Israel this discipline, forming part of the unique way in which he worked in their history.

The Covenant and the Law

There were various forms of contracts, wills, agreements, etc. in the ancient world, just as there are in our own time. Ancient people constructed covenants similar to the one presented at Mt. Sinai. Such covenants were between a superior (perhaps a king or an overlord) who would dictate to an inferior (perhaps vassals, servants, or even a conquered nation) the terms and conditions of the covenant. The covenant at Sinai has the basic features of certain ancient covenants. It was not an agreement between equals, but between a superior and inferiors. Our covenants and contracts usually take form after negotiations have produced mutual agreement. This was not necessarily the case with many ancient covenants, and is certainly not the form of God's covenant with Israel. God gave the terms of the covenant, and it was up to Israel to accept or reject it. They accepted it.

The essentials of this type of ancient secular covenant were:

1. The preamble. In the preamble, the creator of the covenant introduced and identified himself.
2. Historical prologue. In this section the creator of the covenant described his past relationship with the other party, speaking particularly of his beneficence toward the other party.
3. Stipulations of the covenant. Here the creator of the covenant laid out the designations and responsibilities of the other party.
4. Blessings and rewards. These would accrue to the recipients of the covenant if they were willing to abide by its terms. This was sometimes followed by a warning concerning the consequences of violation of the covenant.
5. Response of the recipients.

The covenant at Mt. Sinai followed this general form. See Exodus 19-20. As one reads the statements in chapter 19, the Preamble is missing, but it is included in the beginning of chapter 20:2 with the giving of the Ten Commandments. These things can be seen as God speaks to Moses.

1. Historical prologue: "You have seen what I did to Egypt. . ." 19:4
2. Stipulations: "Obey me fully and keep my covenant." 19:5
3. Blessings: "Out of all nations, you will be my treasured possession . . . you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." 19:5-6
4. Israel's response: "We will do everything the Lord has said." 19:8

The Ten Commandments, Exodus 20:1-19 begin to explain some of the obligations of the covenant, and it is here that the Preamble is given, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." The Ten Commandments follow, giving a sort of constitution for Israel. The stipulations presented in the Ten Commandments fall into two groups. The first group consists of four commandments, and second consists of six commandments. The first four pertain to man's relationship to God.

1. You shall have no other gods before me. 20:2-3
2. You shall make no images. 20:4-6
3. You shall not misuse the name of God. 20:7
4. You shall observe the Sabbath Day. 20:8

The second group pertains to man's relationship to his fellow man.

1. You shall honor your parents. 20:12
2. You shall not commit murder. 20:13
3. You shall not commit adultery. 20:14
4. You shall not steal. 20:15

5. You shall not give false testimony (lying). 20:16
6. You shall not covet. 20:17

In Egypt, Israel had been exposed to many practices contrary to the principles stated in the Ten Commandments. This is particularly evident in reference to the many images and the general polytheism of the Egyptians. Idolatry and image worship became one of the greatest snares to Israel throughout its history. The Ten Commandments, sometimes referred to as The Decalogue (meaning ten words, or ten pronouncements), became the basis of the moral and religious conduct of Israel.

Moses received the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone, written by God, but Exodus 21-40 also contain other laws and the design of the tabernacle. These additional laws regulated such things as treatment of servants, property rights, various moral laws, civil laws, etc. Moses returned and spoke to the people at various times, and then went back to the mountain. He restated the covenant to the people, and once again they agreed to it.

Moses was alternately on the mountain and with the people. On one occasion however he remained on the mountain for about 40 days receiving a variety of instructions and laws. See Exodus 21-31. The people became impatient when Moses remained away for so long, and they asked Aaron to make a god for them. He responded by making a golden calf which the Israelites began to worship. God showed his displeasure with them and he told Moses that he would destroy the nation of Israel and raise up a great nation from the descendants of Moses. Moses interceded for the people, and God listened to his intercession.

When he returned to the camp, Moses discovered for himself just how degrading was the apostasy of the people. He burned the golden calf, and the people were punished. When he went back to the mountain he received two new stone tablets on which he chisels the Ten Commandments.

The Design of the Tabernacle and Other Laws

While on the mountain Moses was given instructions concerning the design and function of the tabernacle. The tabernacle was a relatively small structure, designed as a place where various religious rituals and ceremonies were to be carried out, including the animal sacrifices. Only the priests were allowed to perform these services. See Exodus 25:8. The tabernacle represented the presence or dwelling place for God among the people, but was not a place where the people gathered for weekly worship such as modern church buildings.

The basic layout of the tabernacle was simple. It consisted of an outer court yard which was 150' X 75'. The tabernacle proper was a tent-like structure measuring 45' X 15' X 15'. Certain pieces of furniture were placed inside of the tabernacle and in the courtyard.

As one entered the outer courtyard from the east end, the first thing seen was the altar of sacrifice, and then the brazen laver. It was on this altar that the sacrifices were ordinarily

offered. Sometimes certain sacrifices were made at other places, but it was at the tabernacle that the national sacrifices were offered. Various daily and annual sacrifices were ordered for the religious year. These included a burnt offering of a lamb to be sacrificed every morning and evening. This was doubled on the Sabbath Day. See Exodus 29:38-43 and Numbers 28:9-10.

Below is an approximate number of animals sacrificed as part of the national ceremonies and holy days. In addition to these there were many personal sacrifices which were offered by individuals.

<u>The Occasion/Type of Offering</u>	<u>Number of Animals</u>
Daily and Monthly Burnt Offering:	954
Passover:	70
Feast of Harvest (Pentecost):	10
Day of Atonement:	13
Feast of Tabernacles:	168
Feast of Trumpets:	10
Feast of New Moons:	132
TOTAL ANNUAL OFFERINGS	1,357

These numbers are approximate since there may be some overlapping of these offerings during the various feasts and other holy days. With most of the sacrifices only a small portion of the animal was burned, and the remainder was returned to the one making the offering or given to the priests as their portion, etc. The daily sacrifices however, were completely burned.

The tabernacle was a portable tent-like structure which could be disassembled, moved, and reassembled at another location. It consisted of two compartments. One was referred to as the Holy Place (30' X 15' X 15') and the other compartment was referred to as the Most Holy Place, or Holy of Holies, and it measured 15' X 15' X 15'. The priests moved in and out of the holy place as was needed for performing their daily duties, but only the High Priest was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place, and then only on the Annual Day of Atonement. There were three items of furniture in the Holy Place. They were:

1. The Table of Showbread. This table was made of acacia wood overlaid with gold, and it was placed on the north side of the tabernacle. Each Sabbath twelve loaves of bread were placed on the table, where they remained for one week. Every Sabbath they were changed and the priests ate the bread.
2. The Golden Candle Stand. It was placed on the south side, opposite the Table of Showbread. It is now called the Menorah. It was made of pure gold and had seven prongs. In contemporary Judaism the Menorah has 9 prongs.
3. The Altar of Incense. It was centered just in front of the curtain (often referred to as the veil) dividing the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. The altar of incense also was made of acacia wood, and overlaid with gold. Incense was offered

twice each day, morning and evening, and at the time of certain specified religious observances.

There was just one piece of furniture in the Most Holy Place, but there were three parts of this piece described in Exodus. First there was the Ark of the Covenant. This was simply a box made of Acacia wood and overlaid with gold. Inside of Ark of the Covenant were various important items relating to Israel's religion and history. These items varied from time to time, but it seems that it originally contained only the tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments had been chiseled and the book of the covenant. In the New Testament, the writer of the book of Hebrews states that it also held Aaron's rod which budded and a golden pot of manna.

The covering of the Ark of the Covenant was referred to as the mercy seat, more accurately translated as "cover," and in some translations, "Atonement cover." This cover had a gold crown around it, and had special significance as the place designated for the sprinkling of the blood of the atonement goats on the annual Day of Atonement.

Above this cover were two cherubim facing each other. The exact appearance of the cherubim is not known, and they have been pictured in various forms as angels or winged animals. The Bible does not give a detailed description of these, except to say they faced each other with their wings folded toward each other. In the ancient world the word cherub was used to describe winged animals such as lions, which symbolically stood guard at the entrance of a palace or the dwelling place of similarly important people. Equating the cherubim with winged babies or angels was a much later non-Biblical development, but such imagery has become widely accepted in contemporary religious thinking and art. Instead of angels, as popularly pictured, the cherubim over the mercy seat were probably winged animals, such as winged lions. Their exact form is not clear either from Biblical narratives or from ancient literature, and the etymology of the word is indefinite.

A Brief Summary of Portions of the Law

In broad terms there were five categories of the Law but they do not appear in organized fashion in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These categories are: (1) Religious laws, (2) Moral-Ethical and Family Laws, (3) Civil Laws, (4) Criminal and Judicial Laws, and (5) Hygienic Laws. By looking at these five categories it is easy to see the theocratic character of the nation of Israel. It was truly a God-ruled entity.

One of the most prominent parts of the Law of Moses was its emphasis on the animal sacrifices. The various types included burnt offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, free-will offerings, and others. As stated above, usually only a small portion of the animal was burned, and the remaining parts were distributed, sometime to the priests, sometime to the family of the person making the offering, or to others. Usually the priest or the person bringing the offering would lay his hands on the head of the animal before it was killed, and with many offerings, the blood was sprinkled at a designated place.

Another key part of the Law of Moses was the priesthood. All of the priests had to be of the tribe of Levi, and descendants of Aaron, the older brother of Moses. Aaron was the first High Priest under the Law. The priestly order then became known as the Levitical or Aaronic priesthood. Priests wore prescribed vestments when performing their duties, and were, for the most part, the ones who offered the sacrifices. Priests were married and had families. There was no required celibacy under the Law.

Ceremonial uncleanness also formed an important part of Israel's religious practices. For various acts, not always sinful acts, a person may be considered ceremonially "unclean." Some of these were:

1. A woman following childbirth.
2. A person who had touched a dead body.
3. One who had contracted leprosy.

Depending on the origin of a person's ceremonial pollution, various sacrifices or other ceremonies were required for ceremonial cleansing.

Certain animals were also ceremonially unclean. Animals which God had designated "clean" were those which had a split hoof, and chewed the cud. Other specifications defined certain fish and fowl as clean or unclean. The Hebrews could not eat any food which was defined as unclean.

Certain days were considered Holy Days, and there were also prescribed feasts or other holy times of the year. Among the most important holy days and festivals were the following:

1. Passover. This was to commemorate their deliverance from Egyptian enslavement when God struck the oldest child of the Egyptians.
2. Feast of Harvest which was also referred to as Feast of Weeks because it came seven weeks and one day after the Sabbath of the Passover. In the New Testament it is called Pentecost (fiftieth day). It celebrated the Lord's blessings of the harvesting of crops.
3. Day of Atonement. This was the only required fast day for Israel, although they voluntarily fasted on many other occasions. Read Lev. 16 concerning this important ceremony.
4. Sabbath days and years. There was the regular weekly Sabbath which was the seventh day of the week (Saturday), and on it no work of any kind was to be done. In addition there were the yearly Sabbath observances. Every seven years the Israelites were to leave the land uncultivated so the land could "rest" for the entire year. Whatever might grow up of itself could be eaten. The Year of Jubilee was celebrated every 50th year. On that year, property was returned to original its owners, slaves were freed, debts were cancelled, and the people could not eat what the land produced of itself.

The moral, civil, and criminal codes regulated such things as:

1. Sexual relations, forbidding incest, bestiality, homosexuality, sex outside of marriage, sodomy, etc., as described in Lev. 18.
2. Divorce.
3. Laws of inheritance, provisions for the poor, punishment for crimes such as murder, kidnapping, rape, prostitution, adultery, incest, child rebellion against parents, theft, breach of trust, etc.

Most of the provisions of the Law of Moses are found in the book of Leviticus although Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy also contain summaries and some additional laws. The laws referred to above constituted only a small portion of the many regulations of the Law of Moses, but they give an idea of how comprehensive it was. As previously stated, the Law, including the Ten Commandments, was given only the Hebrew nation, and was not designed as a universal law for all mankind. Just how God dealt with the other nations of the world is not addressed in any detail in the Bible. It should be noted again that the Israelite nation was a theocracy – God ruled government – and the civil, political, criminal, social, moral, and ethical regulations could not be separated from the religious life of the community. God is seen in the Bible as one who is sovereign, working in the history of all nations, but the Old Testament shows his unique relationship with the Hebrew nation ultimately to bring about his eternal purpose in Christ.

Chapter IX

From Sinai to Canaan

Numbers 10:11-13, 12:16—14:9,
Joshua 1:1—2:24, 6:1-25

Introduction

Israel remained at Mt. Sinai for about a year. See Num. 10:11-13. During that time the Law was revealed to Moses, the nation underwent certain organizational changes, the tabernacle was built and set up, and various other national and religious arrangements were made. The twelve tribes of Israel were in the infancy of their nationhood. A complete census of the population was taken, the summaries of which are found in the book of Numbers, the fourth book of the Pentateuch.

Israel continued its journey toward Canaan, the Promised Land. Exodus 13:21 tells of a pillar of cloud which guided their travels by day and a pillar of fire which provided light and guided them when they traveled by night. Exodus 40:37 speaks of the cloud over the tabernacle becoming a signal for the nation to travel or remain at a particular location. In the second month of the second year after leaving Egypt, the cloud lifted, and Israel prepared to leave Sinai.

Provisions were made for the priests and Levites to transport the various items of furniture and the structural parts of the tabernacle. A specified line of march was arranged, and the nation followed the cloud as they moved away from Sinai toward Canaan.

This trek was not without its problems however. Just as the people had complained while on their journey from Egypt to Mt. Sinai, they continued to do so as they moved toward the Promised Land. They tired of the manna, and demanded meat to eat, reflecting on the fact that at least in Egypt they had a variety of foods, but in the desert they were deprived. Miriam and Aaron, Moses' brother and sister, challenged Moses' authority contending that God also spoke through them as well as through Moses. The Lord punished them, reaffirming the leadership of Moses. These types of problems seemed to characterize the entire journey from the time they left Egypt until they entered Canaan.

Exploration of the Land of Canaan

The people continued moving northward, and arrived at Kadesh-barnea in the northern part of the Desert of Paran. From Kadesh twelve spies were selected and sent to spy out the land of Canaan. One man from each of the twelve tribes of Israel comprised the team. They were gone for forty days, and observed that the land was indeed "flowing with milk and honey" just as God had said. They returned bringing with them clusters of grapes which were so heavy that they had to be carried on a pole supported by two men.

A look at the inhabitants of Canaan will help us understand the report of the spies when they returned from their mission. Who were these nations which evoked fear in the minds of the spies? The land was occupied by a number of relatively strong, though

small nations, without a real sense of national unity. The Israelites, on the other hand, were militarily very weak, but had a strong sense of national unity. For the most part, the inhabitants of Canaan were organized as political entities somewhat similar to the Greek city-states which came into their own much later, about 750 B.C. The time of Israel's escape from Egypt was about 1250 B.C., or around 500 years before the Greeks organized their famous city-states. Undoubtedly the city-state types found in Canaan were not nearly as well defined as the later Greek arrangements.

Each of Canaan's cities was generally ruled by its own king, lord, or governor, and usually had its own army. At times there were loose confederations formed among them, usually for defensive purposes. The individual cities may or may not have had a desire to give military assistance to neighboring cities. The Philistines are frequently spoken of in the Old Testament with a king or lord of each of their five primary cities. Although this lack of unity among the nations of Canaan was apparent, Egypt was a powerful united nation which controlled much of Canaan at this time. The Egyptians allowed a great deal of autonomy to the nations of Canaan as is seen in the Tel el-Amarna Letters mentioned above.

The People of Canaan

Among the various nations of Canaan, which the spies thought presented formidable obstacles to the Israelites, were the Amalekites, the Hittites, the Jebusites, the Amorites, and the Canaanites. Others are mentioned at various times, but these appear to be dominant.

Genesis 36:12 tells us that the Amalekites were descendants of Esau, and Numbers 13:29 and 24:20 tell us that they lived in the Negev, the southern most part of Canaan. Exodus 17:8 speaks of an encounter which Israel had with Amalek prior to their arrival at Mt. Sinai, and we meet them also in later battles with Israel. One of the most prominent of these later battles is Saul's battle with Amalek in I Samuel 15.

The Hittites are generally thought to have been of Indo-European extraction, originating in what is the central part of modern day Turkey. They migrated to Canaan probably about the 18th century B.C. These people were unknown to modern scholars until the discoveries at Boghazkoy in 1907. (See Chapter VII.) Here, archaeologists unearthed statues showing the Hittites as short and stocky people, and they were usually pictured wearing heavy clothing. They were not Semites, but later they mixed rather freely with the Israelites. Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba with whom David committed adultery, was a Hittite, a mercenary and a "mighty man" in the army of David, I Chron 11:26, 41.

The Jebusites occupied the city of Jebus, later known as Jerusalem. Although the city was conquered by Joshua at the time of the Israelite invasion, it seems that it was recaptured by the Jebusites, since David conqueror of that city again. See II Samuel 5:6-7. It would appear that some of the Jebusites dwelt among the Israelites at least until the time of Solomon, and they were conscripted as forced laborers to help in Solomon's building projects. See II Sam. 24:16 and I Kings 9:20.

The Amorites also occupied Canaan at this time. Although their early history is obscure, it is known that they had a strong presence in Mesopotamia (Akkad) in 2000 B.C., and migrated to Palestine about the same time as Abraham came from Ur of Chaldea to Hebron. Hammurabi, ruler of Babylon from about 1792 until 1750 B.C., conquered the Amorites, perhaps adding a stimulus in their migration to the west. They mixed readily with the Canaanites, and occupied a considerable portion of the Land of Canaan. Abundant extrabiblical sources show that they were probably the strongest of all of the occupants of Canaan at the time of Israel's entrance into the land. In Joshua 24:15, Joshua referred to Canaan as the land of the Amorites.

The Canaanites were of Semitic stock. They worshipped Baal, and Ashtoreth (Baal's wife and goddess of fertility), and Asherah (the wife of El and mother goddess of Ashtoreth). This worship was characterized by extreme sexual perversion and fertility rites. Jezebel, a Sidonian and the wife of King Ahab was a devotee of Baal. When the Israelites drove the Canaanites out of the land, many of them settled in the area around Tyre and Sidon in what is modern day Lebanon, and became the legendary skilled mariners of the ancient world. The Greeks later referred to them as the Phoenicians.

The Report of the Spies and its Consequences

The spies brought back the report that the land was all that God had said it was, a "land flowing with milk and honey." However, giants were among its inhabitants and they were men of war. Their cities were walled and appeared to be impregnable. Ten of the twelve spies said Israel would not be able to take the land. Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, disagreed with the report of the majority concerning the ability of Israel to successfully invade the land. Once again the people complained against Moses saying they had it better while they were back in Egypt. The people then rebelled against Moses and considered stoning him. God's appearance at the Tent of Meeting subdued the rebellion. Just what was the form of this appearance is not stated, but he expressed to Moses his great anger at the conduct of the people.

The penalty for their rebellion was that they would wander in the wilderness one year for each of the days the spies were gone. This meant forty years of wandering. All who were twenty years old and over at the time the spies were sent out would die during that forty year period and therefore would not enter the land. Joshua and Caleb, the only two faithful spies were the only exceptions to this. The Hebrews then decided to go ahead and invade the land, but Moses told them it would be futile, and that they would have to endure the punishment God had determined for them. In spite of Moses' warning, they attempted the invasion but were defeated. The report of these spies formed an important turning point in the history of the exodus of the people from Egypt and their final entrance into the Promised Land.

For the next forty years then Israel moved from place to place. This is usually referred to as the wilderness wandering, but in fact they traveled to a number of places outside of the deserts of the Sinai Peninsula, moving as far as Moab and the borders of Ammon, and territories of the Amorites. In Deuteronomy 2-3 Moses gives information concerning

their wanderings, some of which is not included in the book of Numbers. They traveled as far north as Bashan in what is known as Trans-Jordan. This city was on a latitudinal line about even with the Sea of Galilee. There they fought with Og, the King of Bashan and defeated him. See Numbers 21:33, 32:33, and Deuteronomy 2-3.

As they wandered from place to place, they encountered many difficulties. There was the rebellion led by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and 250 men (all Levites) who challenged Moses and Aaron, but God opened the earth and it swallowed the three leaders, and fire consumed the 250 men. On one occasion the people ran out of water, and Moses was instructed to speak to a rock and God would bring water out of it. Instead, Moses became very angry with the people and struck the rock with his rod. Water came out of the rock, but God was displeased with him, and told him he would not be allowed to enter the land. A variety of other rebellious acts were met with punishments of various kinds. Interwoven with these narratives are explanations of some of the regulations included in the Law of Moses.

During this period of wandering the allocation of the land was determined. Each tribe was to occupy a certain area of Canaan, and this was to remain as part of the tribal possession. See Numbers 32. Aaron, the brother of Moses died during this period, and was buried at Mt. Hor. Moses and the Israelites, after their wanderings in the wilderness, came to Moab, a country located to the east of the Dead Sea, where the Jordan River flows into it. Here Moses transferred the leadership of the nation to Joshua, delivered his farewell address, and ascended Mount Nebo where he died.

The word “Deuteronomy” means, repetition of the law or second law. The book of Deuteronomy recaptures much of the history of Israel including the exodus events, the giving of the Law, the wilderness wanderings and Moses’ final admonitions to the people. The book concludes with the death of Moses. For the most part the new generation which had grown up during the previous forty years had not experience the slavery of Egypt, nor the exodus and the events at Mt. Sinai. Therefore, in these speeches, Moses retells the history of those events for the new generation. Included in his speeches are many of the problems Israel encountered, their various rebellions, God’s care for them, and the importance of the nation’s obedience to God. He also speaks of God’s blessings to come to them when they enter the land, along with warnings of the consequences of disobedience.

His three speeches in Deuteronomy can be classified in the following way. The first is a brief historical prologue, Deut. 1:6—4:43. The second is a recapitulation of the covenant, stating many of its terms and laws, Deut. 4:44—28:68. The third is Moses’ personal testimony of God’s blessings to Israel, and his promises to them. It also contains Moses’ song and facts about the change in leadership as Joshua is appointed to take his place, Deut. 27:1—33:29. The book concludes with the account of the death of Moses.

The wilderness wanderings constitute a historical event of great significance in the history of Israel. The Feast of Tabernacles (Booths) commemorates the temporary dwelling places of Israel during this time. The forty years of wandering was also a time of great testing of their faith, their apostasy, and return to God.

The Invasion of Canaan

After the death of Moses the Israelites were ready to enter Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. The book of Joshua gives a brief summary of a portion of the conquests which took place. Actually, the entire land was not brought fully under Israelite control until the time of King David, about 1000 B.C. Following the reign of Solomon, David's son and successor, the kingdom divided and much territory was lost, never to be fully regained. The conquest of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua moved along systematic lines with the easier areas conquered first. Some areas appear to have fallen back into the hands of the conquered nations, and later reoccupied by Israelites. Two important facts helped facilitate the conquest. First, the land was occupied by a very diverse population and second, the cities and their rulers were quite independent of each other and had very little unity among themselves.

The conquest is described in the first twelve chapters of the book of Joshua, and can be broadly divided as follows:

1. Crossing the Jordan. 1:1—5:15
2. The beginning of conquest. Campaign in central Canaan. 6:1—10:28
3. The campaign in southern Canaan. 10:29-43
4. The campaign in northern Canaan. 11:1-15
5. Summary of the conquests. 11:16—12:24

The allocation of the land to the various tribes is given in Joshua 13-21, and a summary of the final events of Joshua's life and conquest are given in chapters 22-24.

The name "Canaan" originally meant "land of the purple," referring to the purple dye made from certain shellfish found in abundance along the Palestinian coast. As Israel displaced the Canaanites they moved to the north and settled in what is modern day Lebanon. Later the Greeks gave the name Phoenicia to that area. The purple dye developed by the Canaanites was very valuable and it became the color of royalty in much of the ancient Middle East and in some western nations. The Phoenician alphabet, used by most western countries, is thought to have been developed by these people. If it did not originate with them, they were certainly involved in perfecting it.

The conquest of central Canaan began with the city of Jericho. The account of the conquest of this portion of Canaan is given in Joshua 5:1 – 10:28. This included the destruction of Jericho and Ai, a peace treaty with Gibeon, and the defeat of the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon. These were five cities of the Amorites whose kings banded together to fight against Israel. Although each of the five kings of those cities was killed and the battle won, it is not clear whether Israel occupied their cities at this time. It was at this battle that the sun stood still, and we have the account of Joshua's long day. See Joshua 10:12-14.

As far back as Abraham, God saw the corruption and idolatry of the Amorites and others in Canaan, and he was determined to punish them for their sin. When God promised

Abraham that his descendants would take the land away from the Amorites, he made the statement, “In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.” See Genesis 15:13-16. God is seen working not only in the history of Israel, but also is using Israel to punish the wickedness of other nations. From this perspective, the conquest of Canaan can be seen as a holy war, and certainly the writer of Joshua interpreted those events in that light. See Joshua 1:1-2, 11; 10, 6:16-17, 10:14.

While encamped on the east side of the Jordan River, two spies were sent into Jericho to survey the city. Rahab, a prostitute in Jericho, received the spies into her house, and hid them from the authorities. She told the spies that she and her countrymen had heard what God had done for Israel throughout the exodus period, and believed that God had given the land to Israel. See Josh. 2:8-13. In the process Rahab extracted a promise from the spies that she and her household would be spared when Jericho was captured and destroyed.

Israel crossed the Jordan River and encamped at Gilgal, near the city of Jericho. At this time Israel began to eat from the produce of the land, and the manna ceased. The capture of Jericho is shown as a product of divine intervention, and the city was to be completely devoted to God. The walls of the city fell, Rahab and her family were rescued, and the city was burned. No spoil was to be taken by the Israelites.

Extensive archaeological excavation has taken place in the city of Jericho. Between 1930 and 1936 John Garstang of the University of Liverpool excavated the city, concluding that the city fell during the fourteenth century B.C., and he attributed this to the Israelite invasion. Chronology for this period is difficult and inconclusive. In 1952-58 Kathleen Kenyon led a group of British archaeologists in further excavations at Jericho, and they performed carbon-14 tests of some of the burned material uncovered from the ruins of Jericho. These tests showed evidence of some occupation as early as c. 8000 B.C., but it was not until 7000 B.C. that any sort of fortifications can be established. This and other evidence established the fact that Jericho is history’s oldest city thus far discovered by archaeologists.

Kenyon’s excavations concluded that some of Garstang’s interpretations of his own findings were in error, and that the wall he had identified with Joshua’s invasion should be dated about one thousand years earlier than Joshua’s time. The fact is that very few of the ruins thus far discovered can be dated at the time of Joshua. The city was destroyed and rebuilt numerous times prior to the Israelite invasion in the thirteenth century B.C.

Israel’s next encounter was the battle against Ai. The first attempt was a failure because Achan had taken some of the spoil of Jericho, contrary to God’s directives concerning the city being entirely devoted. When his sin was discovered and he was punished, a second attempt against Ai was successful. See Joshua 7:1—8:29

Through deception, the Gibeonites, who lived close to Jericho, made a peace treaty with Israel, contrary to the instructions God had given. When the Gibeonites offered the treaty

Israel accepted it without consulting God. Such treaties and peace agreements led to many problems for the Hebrews in their later history.

After the capture of various cities in central Canaan the people turned their attention to the south. Although there had already been a victory against the five kings of the Amorites, it seems that new opposition came from Lachish, Eglon, and Hebron and Joshua subdued these cities. Israel then moved further south into the region called the Negev, attacking Gezer, Gaza, and Kadesh-barnea.

The northern campaign was the third and last for Joshua. The city of Hazor, located about 10 miles north of the Sea of Galilee, was the most important city in that region, and Jabin, king of Hazor, summoned a diverse alliance of kings from as far north as Hermon (near southern Syria), and they attacked Israel at the Waters of Merom, an area southwest of Hazor. Once again, Joshua and the Israelites were successful.

Much land remained unconquered, and this conquest continued until the time of David, the second king of the united monarchy. It appears that some of the land settled in Joshua's day was possibly recaptured by its original inhabitants. The book of Judges pictures much of the land as still being occupied by its native people. Although instructions were given for the allotment of the land to the various tribes of Israel, this was not realized until many years later. Joshua's farewell address and his death are recorded in Joshua chapters 23 and 24.

The Philistines

The Philistines are one of the most maligned nations of the ancient Middle East. Little is known about them outside of the Bible, for they left no history or writings. Other nations such as the Egyptians mention them as bitter enemies, pirates and marauders, and they were a frequent threat to Israel during the period of the Judges, the United Monarchy, and the Divided Monarchy.

Their origin is not clear, but the fact that the Egyptians referred to them as the "Sea People" along with some other evidence indicates that their origin was possibly the Aegean Sea or the Greek Islands. From archaeology and Egyptian inscriptions, scholars have learned that the Philistines probably came to Egypt and Palestine from Caphtor, which is almost universally considered to be the island of Crete just south of Greece in the Mediterranean Sea. Therefore they must have been of Greek extraction.

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Egyptian sources also speak of the "Sea People" invading the north coast of Egypt in about 1188 B.C. and that they were repulsed in a naval battle with the forces of Rameses III. Following their defeat, they settled in the southern part of Canaan near the modern day Gaza Strip, establishing five important cities of Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath and Gaza. So strong was their influence, that the name Philistia was applied to an extensive area in the southern part of Palestine although they actually occupied only a small portion of the southern Mediterranean coast. The word Philistia was later changed to Palestine and came to identify a much wider area.

The Philistines are mentioned as early as the time of Abraham (Gen. 26:1, 8), and liberal scholars have surmised that this is a historically incorrect reference since archaeological evidence places their arrival during the 12th century B.C. rather than the 19th century, the time of Abraham. Careful examination has indicated that there was a much earlier, though small settlement of people referred to by that name who occupied the same area. In Gen. 20, 21, and 26:1, 8 Abraham dealt with the people of Gerar, and Abimelech is referred to as the king of the Philistines.

It is important to know that the Philistines probably constituted the most consistent and effective military threat against Israel from the days of the judges until the time of David (the second king of the United Monarchy) about 1000 – 960 B.C. No doubt, this constant threat from the Philistines was an important component leading to the demand for a king which surfaced during the judgeship of Samuel. See I Samuel 8.

Excavations of Philistine Cities

Prior to 1981 only the city of Ashdod (New Testament city of Azotus, see Acts 8:40), had been significantly excavated. In Ashdod was found extensive evidence of the culture of these people. In the 1981 excavation of Ekron a great deal of information came into view concerning the culture and life of the Philistines. Two important discoveries were made during these excavations. First, a group of more than one hundred olive oil presses was discovered which was the greatest number ever found in any Middle Eastern excavation. This probably indicated that the Philistines were among the largest producers of olive oil in the region. Secondly, in conjunction with the olive presses, and sometimes in the same room, four-horned altars were also discovered. These altars appear to have a similar design as those discovered in the lands occupied by Israel.

Although the famous City States of the Greeks did not come to full fruition until the eighth century B.C., the Philistines founded a type of city-state in Palestine. From the statement in I Sam. 13:19-22 we know that Israel had to go to the Philistines to sharpen their farm implements, and other tools, and that the Philistines had iron swords while Israel had none. This advanced knowledge and weaponry possessed by the Philistines gave them a great advantage which Israel seemed to feel was a threat to their own security.

The Close of the Book of Joshua

The closing days of Joshua's life and the division of the land are described in the final chapters of the book of Joshua. Eleven of the twelve tribes were assigned individual territories, but the tribe of Levi, which was charged with caring for the certain religious matters of the nation, occupied specific towns throughout the country. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and one-half of the tribe of Manasseh requested that they receive their territory on the east side of the Jordan River. This was granted, provided that they assisted the rest of the nation in conquering the region west of the Jordan. These territorial allotments became the ancestral property of each tribe, and laws were made to protect this inheritance. Archaeologists, by using the tribal boundaries described in Joshua, have been able to locate these borders with considerable accuracy.

Chapter X

Early Life in Canaan

Judges 4:1-24, 6:1—7:25

Introduction

Following the partial conquest of Canaan under Joshua's leadership, the nation of Israel consisted of a loose confederacy of scattered tribes of people. This period is referred to as the time of the Judges, and its history is found in the book of Judges, the seventh book of the Old Testament. The remnants of many tribes and nationalities of people were still living among the Israelites after the conquests led by Joshua. These were the native populations of Canaan who had occupied the land prior to the Israelite invasion. The book of Judges describes the difficulty created by this situation. It is important that we see the historical, cultural, religious, and political situation of these nations in order to better understand Israel's history during this period. The pagan religious practices, their lack of moral-ethical values, and their idolatry created a wide range of temptations and ultimately apostasy for Israel.

Although there are about twelve mentioned in the book of Judges, some were very minor and the Biblical information is almost nonexistent for them. On the other hand, a considerable amount of information is given for others such as Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson. We will discuss only Deborah and Gideon as important representatives of this period. If the judges had all been consecutive they would have covered about four hundred ten years, which would not fit the known chronology of the period. Actually this period lasted about 180 years. No doubt some of the judges were contemporary with each other, each working in a specific area. However, the record is not clear concerning this, only stating certain localities but without any chronological notes.

Palestine and the Nation of Israel

As previously mentioned, during the early years in Canaan the Hebrew tribes had no central government, but they were united primarily through their religious ties, allegiance to the Law of Moses, and their awareness of the covenant God had made with their nation. The nation had no real capital city although Shechem was of some political importance. The tabernacle was set up at the city of Shiloh, about 20 air miles due north of modern day Jerusalem, and that appears to have been designed as its permanent home.

The Hebrews had driven out portions of the nations of Canaan, but peace treaties were made with others. The inhabitants of the land became a mixture of Hebrews and other nationalities, which proved to be a disastrous arrangement for Israel. The nations of Moab and Ammon lived on the east side of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea, and were particularly troublesome to the eastern tribes, Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh. The Moabites and Ammonites were distant cousins of the Israelites, being the descendants of Lot and his two daughters. The modern day country of Jordan encompasses most of ancient Moab and Ammon, and the present day city of Amman, capital of Jordan, derives its name from the ancient Kingdom of Ammon.

Religious Conditions in Palestine

The polytheism of Canaan, and polytheism in general, came from an acute awareness by people of the unexplainable and uncontrollable forces of nature. People therefore attempted to explain these phenomena in terms of divine powers, and a variety of gods and goddesses who were thought to be in control of those forces. However, this was just one of the roots of polytheism. On the other hand, Israel's monotheism worked in the opposite direction. That is, God revealed himself specifically to them and their ancestors, and their knowledge of God was not derived from their view of nature, but their view of nature came from their knowledge of God. They understood this as God working in the history of their nation, especially in the events surrounding the exodus. Therefore their basic problem in life was not perceived as the need to adjust their lives to the powers of nature, but to adjust themselves to the will of God who had chosen them to be his very own people.

As mentioned earlier, during the period of the conquest of Canaan and the time of the Judges many of the Canaanites were forced up into the area of Tyre and Sidon, in ancient Phoenicia (modern day Lebanon). Their influence over Israel and other nations was felt, not only by force of arms, but also through cultural borrowing, particularly their sexual religious rites and practices.

These gods and goddesses had no sense of morality, and their worship was characterized by a variety of bizarre ritual sexual acts including prostitution and homosexuality, and other sexual perversions. In some cases infant sacrifice were practiced. The looseness of such sexual practices, particularly since they were part of religious observances, made the Canaanite religion particularly attractive to other nations, and Israel frequently fell victim to those practices. In 1929, the discovery of the Ras Shamra tablets in the city of Ugarit (on the northwestern coast of Syria), gave archaeologists excellent information concerning the religious practices of the Canaanites and their fertility cults. The worship of Baal was prominent among the Canaanites.

The period of the judges was characterized by Israel's cycles of apostasy, oppression, repentance, and deliverance. This is repeated throughout the book – the people departed from God, they were dominated by an enemy nation or tribe, they repented and returned to God, and a leader (judge) arose to rejuvenate their faith and lead them toward a solution to their problems, bringing them back to God. Their fidelity was generally very short-lived and the cycle was repeated. It should be noted that this domination was from nations coexisting with Israel in Canaan as well as some from the nations outside of Canaan. The Egyptians and the Hittites (from Asia Minor – modern day Turkey) frequently fought over control of Palestine because of its control of the north-south trade routes. However, during the period of the judges Egypt and the Hittites were relatively quiet.

The judges were usually, though not always, leaders in three categories – religion, military strategy, and political skills. There were notable exceptions to this as seen in Samson, and Samuel. Most of the problems presented during the period of the Judges came as a result of the treaties Israel had made with some of the nations in the land, and the

strength of their idolatrous practices. These nations proved to be a snare and problem to the Israelites.

The Book of Judges

The Hebrew word translated “judge” means a leader or deliverer, not one who gives out a verdict as we think of judges in a court of law. Deborah seems to be an exception to this general practice however. We will look at some of the details of the judgeship of Deborah and Gideon.

The account of the work of Deborah, the only woman judge of Israel, is found in Judges 4-5. As mentioned before, many of the kings in the land of Canaan were rulers of cities which were principalities in themselves. Although Joshua had defeated the Canaanites at Hazor, a city about 10 miles north of the Sea of Galilee, they seem to have revived, and later defeated Israel. Because Israel turned toward evil, God allowed Jabin, the king of Hazor to oppress them for 20 years. In describing the cycle of Israel’s apostasy, oppression, repentance, and deliverance, the writer of Judges says, “After Ehud died, the Israelites once again did evil in the eyes of the Lord. So the Lord sold them into the hands of Jabin, a king of Canaan who reigned in Hazor. Because he had nine hundred iron chariots and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years, they cried to the Lord for help.” See Judges 4:1-3. The name Jabin might have been a throne name or a royal family name for the kings of Hazor because Joshua 11:1-10 speaks of Joshua killing the king of Hazor by the name of Jabin.

Deborah is introduced in Joshua 4:4. She is called a prophetess, and was leading Israel at this time. Only about four other women in the Old Testament are referred to as prophetesses. The terminology used in Judges 4:4-5 suggests that she was in a leadership position even before the activities described in the book, because it is said that Israel brought their disputes to her to be settled. She challenged Barak to lead a rebellion against Jabin by recruiting ten thousand soldiers from the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, two tribes in the northern part of the country. Volunteers from other tribes participated as well. It should be noted that not all of the tribes were called on for help in this or in other incidents. Each tribe seems to have had its own regional interests, and it was not until the period of the Monarchy that a sense of political unity began to appear.

Sisera was the captain of Jabin’s army, and Deborah’s plan was to lure his army out, and have Barak and his men attack unexpectedly. Deborah presented the challenge to Barak, and he agreed to go, only if Deborah would go with him, which she agreed to do. Sisera had nine hundred iron chariots, but they were of little use to him since God sent a torrential rain storm causing the river to overflow, and Sisera’s chariots were bogged down in the mud. When Israel attacked, Sisera abandoned his chariot and fled on foot. Jael, a woman who lived in a nearby tent, saw Sisera fleeing and urged him to come into the tent. She covered him with a rug, and as he slept she drove a tent peg into his head killing him instantly. Israel continued its rebellion against Jabin, and defeated him. The land had peace for forty years.

Israel's fidelity was short-lived and once again the cycle was repeated. They departed from God, and were oppressed by other nations. This time it was the Midianites, Amalekites, and other eastern tribes. The Midianites came from an area of the Arabian Desert east and southeast of the Dead Sea. They were nomadic marauders who brought their animals into Canaan and foraged Israel's produce leaving nothing untouched. For seven years the Midianites and Amalekites overran Israel during harvest time. As a result, the Israelites lost their crops, and their livestock were deprived of necessary grazing. The number and power of these marauding people was so great that they are described as swarms of locust infesting the land, and the Israelites fled to caves and dens in the mountains for protection.

God sent an angel (as a messenger) to a man named Gideon challenging him to deliver Israel from the oppression of the Midianites and Amalekites. When the messenger said that the Lord was with him, Gideon replied, "If the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?" After this encounter Gideon was instructed to offer a sacrifice to God, and then to tear down his father's altar to Baal, and cut down the Asherah pole.

As mentioned earlier, in Exodus and Deuteronomy Moses warned the people against making treaties with the inhabitants of the land. Instead, they were to tear down the Asherah poles of the inhabitants of the land. This story of Gideon and the presence of the Asherah pole is the first instance we have of these poles, but it appears that they may have been in use for a rather long period of time. Remember in Chapter VIII we saw that Asherah was the wife of El, the father of the gods, and Baal, the god of storms and fertility, was El's most notable offspring. A carved or plain pole, or tree stump represented the goddess Asherah. The King James Version uses the word "grove" at this point, reflecting the influence of the Latin Vulgate and the Septuagint.

Gideon's first act of defiance against the idolatry which had come into Israel was to vandalize the shrine of Baal by destroying the pagan altar and cutting down the Asherah pole. He gathered a large army (about thirty-two thousand) in order to accomplish the task of ridding the country of the Midianites and Amalekites. However God told him to reduce the number, because the army would take credit for the victory, rather than giving the credit to God. All who were afraid were told to go home. This left only about ten thousand. God told Gideon there were still too many. They went to the river, and the men who took the water up in their hands and lapped it up like a dog were chosen over those who knelt down to drink. Only three hundred were left, and these made up Gideon's army.

The event which ensued was not so much a battle as it was a tactic of confusion and surprise. The three hundred men of his army were divided into three companies, and they came at night to the Midianite camp with trumpets and torches hidden inside of empty jars. On Gideon's signal they broke the jars, blew the trumpets and shouted, "A sword for the Lord and Gideon." In confusion, the Midianites turned on each other, killing many of their own, and then fled. Following the victory, the people wanted to make Gideon their ruler (perhaps their king?). Gideon refused, saying that they were to be ruled by God.

Gideon had seventy sons by his many wives and concubines, some of whom were Canaanites. Abimelech, one of these sons by a Canaanite woman, saw his father's popularity as an opportunity for himself, and tried to become king of Shechem. See Judges 9. That ancient city was about 30 miles north of Jerusalem, near the modern day city of Nablus, near the modern day West Bank. In order to accomplish his goal of becoming a king he enlisted the help of his mother's family and the people of Shechem. He killed all of the sons of Gideon except Jotham, the youngest. Judges 9:6 mentions that Abimelech was crowned king in Shechem, and Judges 9:22 says that he "governed Israel for about three years." This seems to show some movement toward a monarchy which became a reality during the days of Samuel. Abimelech was not effective in trying to unite Israel and establishing a monarchy. When he was at the foot of the tower in Thebez a woman dropped a millstone down from the tower crushing his skull. Before he died he told his armor bearer to draw his sword and kill him so it would not be said that he had been killed by a woman.

It is easy to see that during the period of the Judges Palestine was very unsettled, bringing confusion to Israel and causing the people to forget their ancestral faith in God. Thus the stage was set for Israel's demand for a king.

Chapter XI

From Confederacy to Monarchy

The Reign of Saul

I Samuel 1:1-28, 2:12-26, 4:1-22, 8:1-22,
15:1-34, 18:1-9, 19:1-12, 24:1-22

Introduction

The closing years of the period of Judges is given in the first eight chapters of the book of I Samuel. By this time the role of the judges changed somewhat and we see Eli, a priest, seeming to be also acting as a judge, although the title is not specifically applied to him. The fourfold cycle of apostasy and return observed in the book of Judges is not found here. Samuel, the last judge, certainly functions in a different role than the previous judges. See I Samuel 7:15.

Even though Israel had no centralized government, there were five things which gave the nations a sort of unity. They were:

1. Their monotheism
2. Their possession of the Law
3. Their covenant with God
4. The experience of the exodus
5. Their belief that God was working in their history.

In spite of this however they felt that they lacked the political structure to sufficiently protect their nation. As we will see in a moment, this led them to the conclusion that a king would be able to solve their problems of national security. Abimelech, the son of Gideon, had attempted to use his father's reputation and success to secure a crown for himself and bring Israel under a monarch. His venture was a signal failure. Over the years conditions changed and the time came when Israel demanded to have a king to rule over them.

We want to look at some of the factors which appear to have played important roles in bringing about this demand. During the transition from this loose confederation of tribes to the monarchy, the charismatic leadership of Samuel, the last judge of Israel, is very important. In fact, Samuel's role as Israel's spiritual leader continues well into the reign of Saul, Israel's first king.

The Historical, Military, and Religious Background

One of Israel's most formidable opponents was the Philistine nation. Coming from the Greek islands, they brought a more expanded world view, were cosmopolitan in their relationships with other nations, and very commercially minded. By comparison, Israel seemed to be more isolated, not sharing the moral, religious, or cultural background of its neighbors. In addition, the Philistines held a monopoly on iron working, and the Israelites had to go to them for certain services linked to ordinary farm implements. G. Ernest

Wright has shown that archaeological excavations have demonstrated that the first datable agricultural implements in Israel were found in Saul's capital city of Gibeah. (G. E. Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, p. 120.) This would confirm the statement in I Samuel 13:19-20 that the Philistines withheld from Israel any knowledge of iron working. The Philistines also had war materials made of iron while the Israelites could use only soft copper. All of these things together certainly gave Israel a feeling of insecurity.

During the conquest under Joshua the tabernacle was set up at Shiloh, a small town located on the road between Bethel and Shechem, about 20 miles north of Jerusalem. This town became a sort of religious capital for the tribes, because it was here that the national sacrifices, religious festivals, and celebrations took place. This, of course, was also the location of the Ark of the Covenant. Although the Old Testament does not mention the destruction of Shiloh, archaeological digs have found evidence of the occupation of the site until about 1050 B.C., but these excavations demonstrate no occupation after that time. The dating of the Shiloh artifacts and ruins correspond with the date of the Philistine's successful battle against Aphek, a city not far from Shiloh. See I Sam. 4. Archaeologists believe that Shiloh was destroyed at about the same time that the battle of Aphek took place.

In addition to the Philistines, the other nations surrounding Israel were also hostile. There were, or had been threats from Moab, Ammon, Midian, Amalek, and Edom. Israel viewed the political and military organization of its neighbors as somewhat ideal, because each of them had a king to lead the nation into battle. Along with their military leadership, the other nations seemingly had a stronger central organization, although they continued to have a city-state sort of independence. Their alliances and military cooperation is clearly seen. Old Testament scholars, in comparing Israel's political system to that of surrounding nations, have concluded that Israel's governmental structure was completely different from its neighbors. No doubt this added to their growing perception of the need for a king.

The Work of Samuel

Samuel stood between the Hebrew tribal confederacy and the Israelite monarchy. He was never a military leader, and politics seemed to be uninteresting to him. However, he was a charismatic religious leader who understood, better than any of his contemporaries, the meaning and importance of the covenant between God and Israel. His intense loyalty to God and the covenant were the filters through which every decision had to pass. He emphasized to the people the importance of loyalty to God and the sovereignty of the Lord. When one understands these aspects of Samuel's character and life, it is easy to see why he was disturbed when Israel demanded a king, and warned them of the future of their nation under a monarch. During the reign of David and Solomon, Israel saw Samuel's predictions and warnings come true. Samuel believed that national unity and strength came through loyalty to God, and that unity through a political power structure was not the answer to its problems of national security. Only after God told Samuel to heed the demands of the people was he willing to acquiesce.

The birth of Samuel, found in I Samuel 1-2, is unique. Hanna, his mother was not able to have children, and she prayed at Shiloh that God would give her a child, promising to give him to God in service. About a year later she had a son, and, at some point in his early childhood she turned him over to Eli the priest at Shiloh. Samuel then became a sort of apprentice under the tutelage of Eli, and ultimately developed into a strong charismatic leader and the last judge of Israel.

Eli was the priest at Shiloh, but his sons, although they frequently offered the sacrifices, were very evil men. Because Eli did not restrain them, the Lord told him that his line of descent would be cut off. A sign of this would be that his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas would both die on the same day. By the time of Eli and Samuel the judgeship seems to have taken on some hereditary characteristics, and was more universal in scope than was seen in the book of Judges. The Old Testament does not give a clear picture of this. While in the service of Eli at the tabernacle in Shiloh, God appeared to Samuel at night and reaffirmed to him the doom he had pronounced on Eli and his sons. All Israel began to recognize Samuel as a prophet.

The Philistines pitched a battle against Israel at Aphek, a relatively unimportant city about 10 miles from the Mediterranean coast, and about 20 miles west of Shiloh. Nothing is said about what precipitated this battle, but Israel was defeated. Israel reengaged the battle bringing the Ark of the Covenant to the battleground apparently thinking its presence would bring victory. Instead, the Ark was captured and the two sons of Eli were among those killed.

The capture of the Ark of the Covenant and its effect on the Philistines presents an interesting and important series of events. There were two battles at Aphek. When the army returned and reported the defeat in the first battle, the people did not understand why God had allowed this. They decided to reengage the Philistines, but they would carry the Ark of the Covenant with them into battle. It should be noted here that by this time the Ark seems to have been thought of as a shrine or a sort of charm with some sort of mystical powers to bring victory. This kind of thinking no doubt came as a result of the influence of the paganism which surrounded and infiltrated Israel. The presence of the Ark of the Covenant in Israel's camp was certainly interpreted that way by the Philistines, for they feared that this was in fact their god in their camp. See I Samuel 4:1-10.

The events of that day were catastrophic for Israel. Upon hearing the bad news Eli, who was ninety-eight years old, blind, and very heavy, fell backwards out of his chair and broke his neck. The battle was lost, many Israelites were killed in the battles, the sons of Eli were killed, the Ark of the Covenant was captured, and Eli their judge died from his fall. Israel experienced a military collapse, a political crisis, and a spiritual demoralization in these events. When the report of all of this came to the wife of Phinehas, one of Eli's sons who was killed in the battle, she died in childbirth, but named her son Ichabod, meaning "no glory." In giving him this name she said, "The glory has departed from Israel for the ark of God has been captured." See I Sam. 4:22. From the time of the death of Eli the nation looked to Samuel as its prophet and new judge.

The Philistines took the ark to Ashdod, one of their important cities in the northern section of the modern day Gaza Strip. It was placed in the temple of Dagon, one of the gods of the Philistines. This resulted in the Philistine idol being destroyed. They moved the Ark from city to city, but always with disastrous results. They finally returned it to Israel on an ox cart along with five gold tumors and five gold rats. It is not clear what the exact significance of these objects might have been, except that there was an ancient practice among some pagan nations of making casts of body parts that were diseased, and present these casts to the gods expressing the diseased person's desire for healing from the deity. In Paul's day this was practiced among the pagan people in Corinth. Some of these objects are now in the archaeological museum in Corinth. The Israelites took the Ark to the house of Abinadab, where it remained until the reign of David.

Samuel assembled the nation at Mizpah, a small city about 12 miles northwest of Jerusalem, for a time of spiritual renewal, challenging the people to put away their idols and serve God. It is both interesting and important to notice that even with the strong spiritual leadership of Samuel, idolatry was still a problem in Israel. This gathering of the Israelites seems to have been interpreted by the Philistines as a threat, and they immediately sent an army to engage Israel in battle. God sent thunder which resulted in panic among the Philistines, and they fled. The military threat of the Philistines was reduced for a short period of time, and throughout the remainder of Samuel's life they were not a significant hazard for Israel. In fact, many of the cities which had been under Philistine domination were returned to sovereignty and there was peace. See I Sam. 7:13-14.

Israel Demands a King

When Samuel got old he appointed his sons judges over Israel but his sons were evil and corrupt men. The elders of the people complained to Samuel about their character. This, along with some other reasons, brought Israel's demand for a king. The beginning of the Monarchy marked another turning point in the history of Israel. The monarchy continued for roughly 430 years, about 120 of which constituted the United Monarchy and the remainder was the Divided Monarchy. During the Divided Monarchy most of the Old Testament wisdom literature and prophetic books were written. A look at chronology suggests that the period from the exodus until the time of Saul, the first king, was about 230 years (1250 B.C. -1020 B.C.). Most of the period of the Divided Monarchy was characterized by apostasy, oppression, and reformation. The reformation periods were very short-lived.

As we have seen, Israel's lack of any kind of strong central government left them with the perception that they were quite vulnerable to attacks from neighboring nations. Their apostasy from God created an almost total reliance on political and military power rather than relying on God. The demand for a king might also have had certain religious overtones. Many pagan nations believed that their king was a sort of mediator between their nation and their gods. This was very strongly held by the Egyptians and Mesopotamians, and it seems to have been characteristic of some of the nations of Canaan. Israel might have fallen victim to this kind of thinking as a result of cultural borrowing.

When Samuel took the people's demand to God, his response to Samuel was, "It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king." I Sam. 8:7. Samuel then warned them about the consequences of their demand, and what their king would ultimately do. In his warning he said their king would:

1. Conscript their young men for his armies, and makes them work to build implements of war,
2. Tax them heavily, taking a tenth of much of their produce,
3. Put them into forced labor situations,
4. Confiscate their land,
5. Take their daughters to be servants of the king, cooks, bakers, and perfumers,
6. Seize some of their personal property such as their animals and flocks.

Looking at this from a historical perspective, Samuel's predictions came true. Later, during the reign of David and Solomon, high taxes, forced labor, large armies, many wars, and the use of their daughters as cooks, bakers, and perfumers all occurred. It should also be noted that in Ex. 19:3-6, the time of the beginning of the Covenant which God made with Israel, he promised Israel that "you will be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" Ex. 19:6. Notice that God was always their king. However, when they began the conquest of Canaan they made treaties with the nations of the land, contrary to the Lord's warnings. They never consulted "God, their king" but acted outside of his authority and authorization. Their demand for a king in I Sam. 8 was a further rejection of their divine king.

Saul and the Beginning of the Monarchy

God sent Samuel to Gibeah to find Saul, whom God himself had chosen as their first king. Gibeah was a small town about three miles northwest of Jerusalem. A short time later Israel gathered at Mizpah where Saul was selected as their king. The majority of the nation accepted him enthusiastically, but a few were not pleased. When the Ammonites besieged the city of Jabesh-gilead, its people ask Israel for help. Saul and his army attacked the Ammonites and won a decisive victory. Saul's kingship was reaffirmed and celebrated, and his victory gained the unfailing devotion of the people of Jabesh-Gilead.

We do not find, in Saul's reign of forty years, very much to commend however. We know little or nothing of any efforts to organize an effective government, he confused his role of king with that of priest, and allowed personal emotional decisions to control too much of his activity. In 1922-23 and again in 1933 W. F. Albright of the American School of Oriental Research excavated the mound which had earlier been identified as Saul's home town of Gibeah. These excavations produced evidence of a fortress which was built during the eleventh century B.C., which would place it during the time of Saul. The fortress, which was probably Saul's palace, showed no signs of royal sophistication, but was a basic, simple structure surrounded by a wall seven feet thick.

To Saul's credit it can be said that he was quite successful in a few of his military campaigns against the Philistines, for example the battle of Mishmash, and his victory over

the Ammonites at Jabesh-gilead. However, just prior to the victory at Mishmash he took it upon himself to offer the sacrifice because Samuel was apparently late in arriving. Samuel rebuked him for this, and told him that God would not continue his dynasty. See I Samuel 13-14.

Saul's ill-advised sacrifice was followed by another blunder when God sent him to battle against the Amalekites. See I Samuel 15. God had said he would punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel during the time of the exodus, and Saul was selected by God as the one through whom this would be accomplished. He was instructed to completely destroy them, and take no spoil. However, he chose to set aside some of God's instructions, by returning with the best of the cattle and sheep of the Amalekites as well as Agag their king. When confronted by Samuel he denied that there was anything wrong in what he did but he finally admitted his sin. At this point there is a distinct downturn in the life and reign of Saul. He and Samuel were estranged from each other, and never saw each other again. Saul's mental condition deteriorated, as an "evil spirit from the Lord" came and tormented him. Today we would probably interpret Saul's moods as a form of depression and paranoia, but the Old Testament treats it differently.

After God's rejection of Saul, Samuel was told to go anoint David, a young shepherd of the tribe of Judah, to be Saul's successor. See I Samuel 16:1-14. The story of David's encounter with Goliath, the Philistine giant, is well known, and the result of that victory had a distinct bearing on the lives of both Saul and David. After David's encounter with Goliath (I Samuel 17), Saul gave him a high rank in the army, and this pleased the people. The killing of Goliath brought a great deal of favorable attention to David, and the women came out from the towns of Israel to meet King Saul dancing with joyful songs and tambourines. They were singing, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands." I Sam. 18:6-9 Saul was upset that they ascribed to him the killing of thousands but to David tens of thousands. From this time forward Saul kept a jealous eye on David, perceiving him to be a great threat to his own position and kingly power, and not aware that David had profound respect for Saul as "the Lord's anointed."

Saul and David

When an evil spirit came on Saul and he was overcome with depression, his attendants procured the services of David to play the harp to soothe Saul's troubled mind. Twice Saul attempted to kill David with his spear, but David eluded him. Through all of this David's popularity as a charismatic leader continued to grow. In the midst of the turmoil David established a long term friendship with Jonathan, Saul's son, and Saul offered his daughter Merab to David as a wife. In return he expected David to serve faithfully in his army, and hopefully would be killed by the Philistines. David refused the marriage offer, but he finally married Michal, another daughter of Saul. I Sam. 18:12-30. This pleased king Saul.

Chapters 19 through 31 of I Samuel describe Saul's persistent efforts to destroy David, pursuing him throughout the southern part of Judah (the Negev). Many conflicts took place, and David consistently showed respect for Saul. On at least two occasions he had

the opportunity to kill Saul but he refused saying he would not harm “God’s anointed.” The fact that most of this pursuit took place in the southern part of the country became an important factor in David’s early days as king. He fled from Saul and took refuge in the Philistine city of Gath where he remained for a short period, at times acting as if he were insane, and the people of Gath did not harm him. I Samuel 21:10-15.

From Gath he went to the cave of Adullam and then to Moab. At Adullam many distressed people joined him, and his band of followers came to about four hundred men. They provided a living for themselves by protecting the inhabitants of the villages of the Negev from the Philistines and other marauders. Some of these incidents are found in I Samuel 23. Still, Saul relentlessly pursued him, but David’s popularity continued to grow and his band of followers expanded to about six hundred men.

By protecting the people of the Negev, David established a strong following among them. On one occasion he requested food from Nabal, a land owner in the Negev who had benefited from David’s protection but the request was refused and David was ridiculed. Abigail, Nabal’s wife apologized for the behavior of her husband. Later Nabal gave an elaborate banquet, and became very drunk. The next morning he developed a heart ailment and died after a few days. Following his death, David married Abigail, Nabal’s widow. See I Sam. 25:1-40.

When Saul was told that David was back in the Desert of Ziph he resumed his pursuit. Once again David had a chance to kill Saul, but he only took his spear and water jug while Saul slept among his troops. These types of incidents characterized Saul’s pursuit of David, and they seem to have dominated his activities.

The Philistines continued to fight against Israel, and Saul’s emotional condition continued to deteriorate. He had lost all touch with God, and his jealousy of David became the obsession of his life. Prior to the battle of Mt. Gilboa Saul disguised himself, and consulted the witch of Endor – a necromancer – concerning what he could expect at the battle. Saul asked the necromancer to “bring up” Samuel, who had died quite some time before. She “brought up” Samuel from the dead, apparently to her own great surprise. Samuel told him that he and his sons would be killed the next day in their battle with the Philistines. The battle took place at Mt. Gilboa, located about 5 miles southeast of Megiddo in west-central Palestine. Saul was critically wounded in the battle, and told his armor-bearer to finish him off, but the armor-bearer refused to do so. Saul then took his own life. Saul’s son, Jonathan, was also killed in the battle.

The reign of Israel’s first king came to a tragic close. Saul’s life was one of complexity and confusion. He began as a very humble man, feeling himself unworthy of the appointment as king, but his political power became his downfall. He usurped the religious authority of Samuel by offering the sacrifice for the nation’s military endeavor when this was not his prerogative. Perhaps he was trying to move his political power into the realm of religion much as the pagan kings did. He disobeyed God in his refusal to destroy the Amalekites and their possessions as God had instructed him to do. Furthermore, he misjudged David, perceiving him as an opponent when he really wanted to be a strong ally of

Saul. These things drove Saul to such intense jealousy that his entire later life was driven by the insatiable desire to destroy David. Saul thus became one of the most tragic figures in Israelite history.

Chapter XII

The United Monarchy

The Reign of David

II Samuel 1:1-16, 2:1-32, 5:1-25, 8:1-18,
11:1—12:14, 13:1-22, 15:1-20, 18:1-18

Introduction

The battle of Mt. Gilboa not only brought the death of Saul and his son Jonathan but it also placed the Philistines in control of the heart of western Canaan. The loss of this battle was demoralizing and devastating to Israel. The transition from Saul to David was not without difficulty. David became king over only a small portion of territory in the southern part of Judah with Hebron as his capital. This city was about 18 miles south of Jerusalem. In Israel there was still a party very loyal to Saul, and skirmishes, both military and political began to take place between David's followers and Saul's followers. The first part of the book of II Samuel deals primarily with the consolidation of power in the south under David. The history of Israel shows David as one of the central figures in the formation and political structure of the nation. For the first time Israel was a truly united political entity, something which had not been achieved under Saul.

The news of Saul's death was brought to David by a young man who seems to have thought he would be rewarded for his announcement. Instead, David's profound respect for "the Lord's anointed" brought swift retribution to the messenger. David had him executed. David's poetic lament for Saul and Jonathan shows the love David had for his close friend, and the profound respect he had for Saul. Although the poem does not enumerate any of Saul's accomplishments, it praises him by saying, "O daughters of Israel, weep for Saul who clothed you in scarlet and finery, who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold," II Samuel 1:24. Following the death of Saul, his body was desecrated by the Philistines, but was finally buried by the people of Jabesh-Gilead. David showed kindness to the people of Jabesh for their kindness to Saul.

David, King in Hebron

As stated above, David's accession to kingship of Israel did not come all at once. For seven years and six months he ruled only a small southern portion Judah. During his days as a fugitive, he circulated throughout the Negev, the extreme southern portion of Palestine, making friends along the way. In his favor was the fact that he himself was a Judean, being a native of Bethlehem. Many who were distressed, those in debt, the discontented, and outcast came and joined him while he was being pursued by Saul. This small army of David's followers offered protection to the towns, villages, and wealthy landowners in southern Judah from marauding tribes and other enemies in the area. In exchange David and his men received favors and financial support. By doing this he created an excellent foundation for the loyalty of these people when he became king.

Part of his strategy during his flight from Saul seems to have been to establish an ambiguous relationship with the Philistines whose five primary cities were along the southern

coast of Palestine. Although it seems that the Philistines were somewhat uncomfortable with this arrangement, they cautiously accepted it, and David used it to his own advantage. This can be seen in his stay at Gath on two separate occasions while he was fleeing from Saul. See I Samuel 21:10-14 and 27:1-12. Sometime after the death of Saul, David and his men moved to Hebron where the men of Judah anointed him king.

Abner had been the commander of Saul's army and Joab the commander of David's band of followers. David's men had become a sort of renegade army. In a strategic move, Abner made Ishbosheth, Saul's son, the King of Israel. Ishbosheth seems to have been a man of weak personality, and Abner became more important in the affairs of the kingdom than Ishbosheth. At the town of Gibeon the army of Ishbosheth, led by Abner, pitched a battle against the army of David led by Joab. David's army prevailed. This had the characteristics of a civil war between the two factions within the nation. As Abner and his army retreated, they were pursued by Joab and his army. A truce was declared, and each returned to his own area. War between the forces of David and those of Ishbosheth continued for a period of years. David's position grew stronger while Ishbosheth's position grew weaker.

David had married Michal, Saul's daughter, but while he was fleeing from Saul Michal was left behind, and had finally remarried. A breach had occurred between Abner and Ishbosheth, and Abner made overtures to David about a peace agreement. Abner and David agreed to meet, provided David's wife, Michal, would be brought back to him. Ishbosheth himself agreed to send her back, but Abner's meeting with David turned out to be the beginning of his defection over to David's side. Abner agreed to encourage others all over Israel to proclaim David their king. Just after Abner left to return to Ishbosheth, supposedly to complete the treaty, Joab returned from a military raid, and upon finding out what had transpired he became angry with David for allowing Abner to return to Ishbosheth. Joab then pursued Abner and killed him to avenge his brother Asahel whom Abner had murdered earlier. David was repulsed by Joab's murder of Abner.

Following this, two young men stabbed Ishbosheth in his bed, cut off his head, and brought it to David, thinking they would be rewarded. David responded with fury, and had the men executed. These incidents left the northern sector without a king or a central uniting figurehead. A group of Israelite elders from the north came to David in Hebron, asking him to become king over all of Israel. By a covenant agreement David became king over the entire nation, effectively uniting the country in a way that it had not known before.

Not only are the events described above important in themselves, but the religious, political, and social aspects of those movements must also be considered. The entire life of David underscores his charismatic leadership and his ability to move toward the goals and priorities he had set for himself and the nation. One can only speculate about what went on in his mind as he developed his kingdom, but such speculation is not without benefits to us.

David's Early Reign Over Israel

David ruled Israel from c.1000 until 961 B.C. Throughout much of the ancient history of the Middle East, Egypt and Assyria dominated many nations surrounding their own homelands, but history also shows that both of them fluctuated between strength and expansion, followed by weakness and internal problems. During David's reign both Assyria and Egypt were trying to deal with problems at home, and posed no real military or political threat to Israel. The Philistines were fairly well confined to their southern coastal area, their monopoly on iron had been broken, and they were no longer a very strong threat to the security of Israel. The Hittites were also weak during this period, meaning that David's international problems were more or less confined to the smaller states such as Moab, Ammon, and Edom.

David also began to establish good public relations with those in Israel who had been loyal to Saul. He ordered the execution of the assassins of Ishbosheth, Saul's son and his short term attempted successor, no doubt demonstrating to the whole country his desire to be fair to the descendants of Saul. Later he sought to show special kindness to other members of Saul's household, by taking Mephibosheth, Saul's cripple grandson, into his own personal care and restoring to him all of Saul's property. In ancient times a new king would frequently exterminate the previous monarch's family and his political friends, so David's action here were probably seen as genuine acts of compassion.

Soon after he was made king over the entire country he captured Jerusalem from the Jebusites and wisely moved his capital from Hebron to Jerusalem. Back during the judgeship of Eli the Ark of the Covenant was captured by the Philistines, but was returned to Israel because of the trouble it had caused the Philistine cities. From that time forward it had remained in the house of Abinadab, but David made arrangements to bring it to Jerusalem amid lavish celebrations, thus making Jerusalem the religious capital of the nation as well as its political capital.

Militarily David's endeavors proved to be almost universally successful. Not only did he defeat the Philistines, but he also subdued the Moabites, the Ammonites, and the Edomites going as far south as Ezion-Geber, the port city on the northern shore of the Gulf of Aqabah. This opened to him the possibility of commerce with countries along the Red Sea and beyond. He expanded Israel's dominion as far north as Kadesh, in central Syria north of Damascus, placing the trade routes between the Red Sea, Syria, and other northern regions under his control. This was one of his most important military successes, because it effectively gave him control over Syria, one of the strongest of his neighbors. These conquests constituted Israel's most extensive expansion in its entire history.

Of special interest was the extension of the territory to Ezion-Geber because of the minerals in the area, particularly iron and copper. The archaeological expeditions of Nelson Gleuck, under the direction of the American Schools of Oriental Research, uncovered an iron smelting installation at Ezion-Geber, and other discoveries which showed this to be an important commercial port during this period. This kind of expansion opened great

economic opportunities which were begun under David, and continued for many years, bringing great wealth to the country.

Other archaeological evidence has shown considerable material prosperity dating back to David's time, and the excavations at Debir and Beth-shemesh, two important southern cities, have uncovered the ruins of identical walls which employed a type of construction not previously known in Palestine. No doubt the breaking of the Philistine's monopoly on iron brought a sort of technological revolution in agriculture and building. Extensive building projects added an important local dimension to David's reign. At Beth-shemesh and Lachish large palaces and other structures, which are thought to have been government buildings, have been excavated. Many of these discoveries date back to the time of David. He made an important political and economic move by establishing friendly relationships with Hiram, king of Tyre, who furnished cedar, stone, and craftsmen for many of David's building projects. This alliance with Hiram later proved to be a snare to Israel when they began serving Baal, Ashtoreth, and Asherah, the gods and goddesses of the Phoenicians. David's military exploits and national expansion are described in II Sam. 8-10.

David's political insight, building projects, military success, public relations skills and religious overtures had great significance for Israel during his own lifetime. Following generations looked at him as the ideal man of God and ruler of Israel. Bringing the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem once again brought a measure of religious unity to Israel, giving the nation a central focus in their worship of God. The covenant God made with the house of David and his descendants at that time was an important step in the fulfillment of the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, along with the Mt. Sinai covenant.

Beginning with David there is a progressive development of the Messianic hope of Israel (II Sam. 7). This topic also occupies a significant portion of the book of the prophet Isaiah who lived later in the eighth century B.C. God's promise to David that his descendants would always occupy the throne of Israel was an important matter. Together, these components formed a solid structure for his kingdom. Indeed, the Golden Age of Israel had been inaugurated. All things considered, archaeological findings, history, and the Biblical accounts, the administration of King David was legendary in its accomplishments.

Sin and Consequences

As the history of David's royal court develops, the Biblical account describes with equal candor his weaknesses and failures and the consequences of his sins. His misdeeds and sins had far reaching effects, and the consequences were suffered by many people who were completely innocent. The absolute honesty with which the historian treats the events of such people as David is noteworthy. The Bible consistently gives accounts of the weaknesses as well as the strengths of its heroes.

David had an illicit sexual affair with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, a trusted and high ranking mercenary soldier in David's army. This affair came about in part, because David allowed his personal preferences to take the place of his royal responsibility. His army was at war at the Ammonite city of Rabbah, the modern day city of Amman, Jordan. David chose to remain in Jerusalem instead of leading his army as he should have done. He saw Bathsheba bathing on her housetop, and sent for her. Their adulterous relationship led to her pregnancy. In order to cover his sin, David arranged for Uriah to be killed in the battle.

After his affair with Bathsheba the prophet Nathan confronted David with his sin, and told him, "Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own. This is what the Lord says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.'" II Samuel 12:10-12. This created a major turning point in David's history.

Nathan's statement to David seems to indicate that his sin would become public knowledge and we can probably assume that his family knew about it as well. Relatively little is said about David's personal life as king, but the conduct of some members of his family gives us insight into what might have characterized his family life. Most of the events described took place after his sin with Bathsheba. There can be little doubt that David's military and political success, his popularity, and his power all contributed to this temptation and his infidelity.

Shortly after he was confronted by Nathan the prophet, a tragic incident took place when Amnon, one of David's sons, raped his half-sister Tamar, and Absalom, her full brother, killed Amnon. Although Absalom seems to have been David's favorite son, he fled from his father to live with Talmi his maternal grandfather in Geshur, near the Sea of Galilee. He remained there for three years.

There was a great rift which developed between David and Absalom, although as time went on, David longed to see his son again. Absalom returned to Jerusalem, but two more years passed before he was allowed to see his father. Shortly thereafter he began a conspiracy against his father, successfully taking over the reins of government, and David had to flee into exile. Later David fought against the army of his son, and Absalom was finally killed by Joab.

David returned to Jerusalem, and resumed his reign, only to be met with another rebellion from Sheba, an otherwise unknown troublemaker. David considered this to be potentially worse than Absalom's rebellion because "all the men of Israel deserted David to follow Sheba. But the men of Judah stayed by their king." (Judah generally refers to the southern part of the country while Israel came to be understood as the northern part.) Sheba and his men were subdued. II Samuel 20:1-22. More battles with the Philistines ensued, and once again they became a threat to Israel.

David's relationship with his family appears to have been less than ideal, and many of the events which took place after Nathan's condemnatory message apparently resulted from some of David's own parental neglect. Just prior to David's death, his son Adonijah tried to usurp his father's kingdom. In I Kings 1:6-15 the historian gives us a glimpse of David's faulty past relationship with Adonijah, and the same fault may apply to his relationship with his other offspring. Speaking of Adonijah and David, the historian says, "His father had never interfered with him by asking 'Why do you behave as you do?'" This certainly indicates that Adonijah lacked discipline from his father and rebellion was the result.

David's Contributions to Israel

In spite of the negatives of David's life, he certainly stands as the most beloved king in Israel's history. It was with him that the monarchy gained a foothold, bringing with it international recognition and the beginning of Middle Eastern grandeur. Trade brought wealth to the nation, and the borders of Israel enlarged to their farthest extent in history. David was able to preserve the religious identity of the nation, and laid out the plans for the temple which was built later by his son Solomon. Most important of all, he became the progenitor of the family line through whom the Messiah was finally to be born.

Chapter XIII

The United Monarchy

The Reign of Solomon

I Kings 1:1-53, 3:4-15, 5:1-18, 8:54-66,
10:1-29, 11:1-13, 11:26-40

Introduction

The reign of David was characterized by conquest and the defeat of Israel's enemies. On the other hand, the reign of his son Solomon was characterized by peace, prosperity, and grandeur. David placed the kingdom on a sound international and political footing, and Solomon reaped the benefits of the accomplishments of his father. Building projects, commerce, economic expansion, and Middle Eastern regal splendor were hallmarks of Solomon's reign. David seems to have been sensitive to the needs of the people, and many of his actions reflect excellent skills in public relations. Solomon however, seems to have had little regard for these things. Instead, he became a very indulgent, free-spending king who was very interested in the grandeur of his surroundings and a lavish lifestyle, without much regard for the burdens he was placing on his subject. When the Queen of Sheba visited him she was amazed at his wisdom and the lavishness of his kingdom. She said she had been informed about his splendor, but her expression was, "Not even half was told me." This extravagance was partly responsible for the rebellion and division of the kingdom which occurred following Solomon's death. Solomon was the third and last ruler of the United Monarchy, reigning from 961 to 922 B.C.

Who Will Be David's Successor?

As previously mentioned, Solomon's accession to the throne did not come without difficulty. In his later years, David seems to have been inactive or may have been incapacitated and not able to function effectively as ruler. Adonijah, now apparently David's oldest son since both Amnon and Absalom had been killed, attempted to become king just prior to the death of his father. Since he had the support of Joab, the commander of David's army, and Abiathar, the priest – presumably the High Priest – it may be that he was expected to succeed his father. Although many other nations had a dynastic or inherited succession in place for their kings, no such practice had yet been established in Israel, so David's successor was not predetermined by any sort of tradition or custom.

Prior to David's death Adonijah arranged for chariots, horsemen, and runners to form a victorious procession and proclaim him king, somewhat reminiscent of Absalom's earlier usurpation of power. Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon, intervened at this point, calling on the prophet Nathan to join her in protesting Adonijah's seizing the regal power. She reminded David that he had promised that her son Solomon would be his successor, although the Bible does not give an account of that promise. Zadok, another priest, and Nathan took steps to declare Solomon king, by setting him on David's own royal mule, anointing him as king, and bringing him to sit on David's throne. Great fanfare accompanied this procession. David gave Solomon his charge, advising him to purge the kingdom of certain people who had been adversaries of David. Solomon did this, in what appears

to have been a bloody extermination of his enemies. Among those killed were Adonijah and Joab. Abiathar the priest was deposed from the priesthood. I Kings 2:23-35. The Biblical account shows all of the trappings of a genuine political power struggle in which those who were victorious eliminated those whom they had defeated. Some of the evils of an ancient total monarchy become apparent in these acts.

Following these things Solomon began carrying out the task of organizing the government which had been begun by his father. During the early part of Solomon's reign he asked God for wisdom to rule the people effectively. This was a wise choice but Solomon did not always use his wisdom wisely. God promised him not only wisdom, but wealth and honor as well.

David had thought it unfit for him to have a palace when the Ark of the Covenant had no permanent housing – temple. He therefore planned to build a temple in Jerusalem. God prohibited this, saying that it would be built by his son. Solomon was the son who was finally to accomplish this.

Building and Dedication of the Temple

The long standing friendship which David had sustained with Hiram, King of Tyre was renewed by Solomon, and Hiram provided stone, cedars from Lebanon, and craftsmen to assist in building the temple in Jerusalem. In order to perform such a great construction project, Solomon conscripted thirty thousand forced laborers from among the Israelites to work on the temple. Altogether, counting the workers sent by Hiram, there were more than one hundred eighty-three thousand who worked on the temple project at one time or another. Its construction took seven years to complete. See I Kings 5:13-18. The conscription of laborers reminds one of Samuel's warning when Israel demanded a king. See I Samuel 8:10-18. The temple sanctuary was approximately double the dimensions of the tabernacle, and its furnishings were the same. Solomon spent thirteen years building a palace for himself, along with a great many other building projects. See I Kings 7:1. The dedication of the temple was a lavish affair oriented around Solomon's prayer of dedication. The complete story is found in I Kings 5-8.

Throughout his reign Solomon expanded Israel's industrial and commercial output, and imported many goods from other countries. There was relative peace throughout the region, and his reign was characterized by the development of many international ties. He mined minerals, including gold, silver, iron, and copper, and carried on vigorous trade through the port of Ezion-Geber on the Gulf of Aqaba.

There were also other building programs undertaken by Solomon. He fortified the city of Megiddo, located south of the Sea of Galilee in the Valley of Jezreel (also referred to as the Plain of Esdraelon), where the famous Stables of Solomon were located. Its strategic military location made it the scene of some decisive battles in the Old Testament. Megiddo is one of the most thoroughly excavated sites in the Middle East, and has yielded much information dating back prior to the time of Abraham. Some of the buildings unearthed by archaeologists at Megiddo are considered among of the best representatives of

Solomonic building. Along with these things mentioned in I Kings, Ezekiel 40-43 gives additional details. Archaeological discoveries in and around Jerusalem have given much information concerning the elaborate character of Solomon's kingdom. Much of the architecture and artistic beauty of Solomon's projects had characteristics in common with Phoenician art and architecture. This may have come about because of Solomon's close ties to Hiram and the Phoenician craftsmen he sent. Solomon paid Hiram by giving him certain cities in Galilee (I Kings. 9:10 ff).

Commerce and Trade in the Solomonic Era

In cooperation with Hiram, Solomon built a fleet of ships which were moored at Ezion-Geber on the Gulf of Aqaba, giving access to the Red Sea and beyond. See I Kings 9:26, 10:11-29. He carried on widespread commerce with other countries, trading in gold, silver, ivory, and animals including great export-import commerce with the Hittites, and the Syrians. His projects were so lavish that it was said, "Nothing was made of silver, because silver was considered of little value in Solomon's day," (I Kings 10:21) and "The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees in the foothills." (I Kings 10:26-27). In speaking of the gold which came to Solomon yearly the record says, "The weight of the gold that Solomon received yearly was 666 talents, not including the revenues from merchants and traders and from all the Arabian kings and the governors of the land." (I Kings 10:14-15). This is equal to about twenty-five tons of gold. It is difficult for us to imagine the magnificence of Solomon's undertakings.

Solomon's Decline and His Last Days

Solomon created what we could rightly call a very large Middle Eastern harem of 700 wives and 300 concubines. Many of these appear to be political marriages with foreign woman. These foreign wives turned his heart away from God to paganism. An interesting sidelight to Solomon's marriages is the fact that he married the daughter of Pharaoh, king of Egypt (I Kings 3:1). Later, Pharaoh invaded the city of Gezer, an ancient Canaanite town located about twenty miles west and slightly north of Jerusalem, and gave it as a wedding gift to his daughter who had married Solomon. (See I Kings 9:16.) Solomon built "a high place for Chemosh, the detestable god of Moab," and "followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites." See I Kings 11:4-8. Because of these things God allowed foreign nations to rise up against Solomon, and various rebellions took place among the nations which had been conquered by David. Egypt and Syria became his adversaries, and Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, formerly one of Solomon's trusted official and friend, turned against him and had to flee to Egypt because Solomon tried to kill him. In a symbolic gesture, Ahijah, a prophet, met Jeroboam and took his own new coat, and tore it into twelve pieces, giving Jeroboam ten of the pieces. He said that God would take the kingdom away from Solomon's heir and give ten of the tribes of Israel to Jeroboam.

Solomon's Successes and Failures

In many ways Solomon's reign is difficult to assess. His devotion to God was firm in the beginning of his reign, but it faded in his last days, and he became an idolater. His wisdom turned to folly as we see his extravagance and disregard for the welfare of his subjects. Yet, he composed three thousand proverbs, some of which are preserved in the book of Proverbs, and wrote over a thousand songs. See I Kings 4:32-33. Among his literary works were portions of the book of Proverbs, although it is not clear just how much of it is attributable to him. Portions of the book are specifically attributed to other writers. The authorship of the Old Testament book, Song of Solomon is not known. It may have been written by Solomon himself, but it seems clear that the book was written about Solomon. It is a song about the celebration of the love he had for one of his wives. The book of Ecclesiastes was certainly written about Solomon, and pictures him as the author. However, it may have been written later by another author depicting Solomon's wisdom coupled with his frustrations with life. It is somewhat pessimistic in the beginning as it describes Solomon's search for the meaning of life and happiness. However, the optimism of the middle and close of the book is obvious. It ends with the advice that youth should seek God early in life before old age comes with all of its inherent difficulties and its lack of pleasure.

The peaceful character of Solomon's reign is certainly commendable, but much of this is due to the conquests of his father David. Solomon wisely followed policies of political and military strength, although he did not have to fight any major wars.

Another of Solomon's contribution to the nation was his reorganization of the government. By building on some of the work of his father David, Solomon divided the country into twelve administrative districts which, in some cases, violated the traditional tribal divisions of the land. This seems to have increased the efficiency of the government, and could be responsible for a good part of the peaceful character of his reign. By doing this, it is possible that Solomon caused some of the ancient tribal character of Israel to begin fading away.

Solomon's commercial and industrial advances meant that Israel's international influence and prestige were increased. He extended trade and commerce so that Israel became very wealthy, and was known as a major economic entity in the Middle East. He brought much gold into the country from Ophir, and, along with Hiram, king of Tyre, developed strong sea-faring adventures out of the port of Ezion-Geber.

His building projects were numerous and famous, but seem to have become an important factor in fracturing his kingdom. In order to implement these projects he burdened the people with high taxes, and used conscripted labor. Also, he enslaved some of the non-Israelite population. Among his building projects was the building and development of "Chariot Cities," further fortification of the city of Megiddo, the building of his own palace, and the temple in Jerusalem. Many of the Israelites appear to have viewed some of these projects as evidence of Solomon's extravagances, leading finally to the revolt of Jeroboam and the division of the kingdom.

The Temple and Theocracy

Although the temple gave a focal point to Israel's religious practices, it also seems to have contributed to a loss of personal involvement of the people in the practice of their religion. Temple events seem to have become spectacular and filled with display, perhaps at the expense of the simpler and more personal practices. Also Solomon allowed his wives to lead him into idolatrous practices, and the entire nation paid the price for this. Theocracy was not killed during Solomon's reign, but some seeds of its deterioration were planted at this time.

The ages of Solomon was (and is) considered the Golden Age of Israel. It was partially ushered in by his father, but brought to fruition by Solomon himself. His building projects and commercial enterprises, accumulated vast wealth for himself and the nation, and he was considered one of the most lavish and effective rulers of any Middle Eastern nation during this period. He did much to mold and unify Israel politically and culturally, but it was these very things which caused Israel to deemphasize its dependence on God, ultimately leading to its downfall.

Chapter XIV

The Northern Rebellion

I Kings 12:1-33, 14:21-31

Introduction

The “golden age” of the Monarchy was made up of the reign of David and of Solomon, lasting approximately eighty years. David expanded the kingdom, and gave it military and political stability, but he was also an effective religious leader. Solomon gave grandeur and cultural prestige to the kingdom, and expanded its industry, trade, and international position. But he oppressed the people with forced labor, high taxes, and public burdens. He married many foreign wives, probably for political reasons, and in his later life, allowed these women to lead him away from God.

Because of Solomon’s burdensome policies, there was a great deal of national discontent among the populace, particularly during the latter part of his reign. His son Rehoboam was to be heir to the throne, but the insurrection of Jeroboam caused the kingdom to divide. During a portion of this Divided Monarchy period the Old Testament prophets did much of their work. There were both literary prophets (those who produced writings) and non-literary prophets (those who spoke, but did not leave any writings). Examples of non-literary prophets are Elijah and Elisha. Examples of literary prophets are Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah. The divided monarchy lasted about 200 years, from 922 B.C. until 722 B.C. Some scholars however, date the insurrection of Jeroboam at 930 B.C. rather than 922 B.C. It should be noted that some of the dates assigned to the kings of this period are not exact, because the information is not complete and some were coregents with their fathers. The chronological problems of this period are very complex. In 722 B.C. the Assyrians invaded the kingdom of Israel (northern kingdom), laid siege to the city of Samaria, and took its people captive. The kingdom of Judah (southern kingdom) remained about 135 years after the fall of the north. In 587 B.C. Jerusalem fell to the invading armies of the Babylonians, and its inhabitants were exiled to Babylon.

The Revolt of the North

Rehoboam, Solomon’s son, was heir to the throne of his father. Shortly after Solomon’s death the people assembled at Shechem for the purpose of making Rehoboam their king. Shechem, located about 35 miles north of Jerusalem, had been a city of considerable religious significance since the days of Joshua. It was here that the covenant had been renewed under Joshua (Josh. 24), and the city had retained its religious and national significance through the years. The selection of this city as the site for the coronation of Israel’s new king was probably a very deliberate act. The people apparently sought to have the proceedings in a neutral place rather than having it take place in Jerusalem.

Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, had been a foreman in some of Solomon’s construction projects but he broke his relationship with Solomon and had to flee to Egypt. When Solomon died, Jeroboam returned from his Egyptian exile. At Shechem the people demanded a policy change from the oppression they had experienced under Solomon. They asked

Rehoboam, Solomon's son, to reduce their burdens and they would serve him. Rehoboam sought the advice of some older counselors who told him to listen to the people and lighten their burdens. If you do this the people will serve you. Rehoboam also sought the advice of younger counselors with whom he had grown up. Their advice was opposite of the older counselors. In spite of the fact that the national burdens levied on the people were almost unbearable, Rehoboam took the advice of his younger counselors and informed the people that under his rulership they would have to bear even heavier taxes and national burdens than those imposed by his father, Solomon. "My little finger is thicker than my father's waist. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions." I Kgs. 12:10-11. A scorpion was a whip with a metal tip.

This resulted in the rebellion of the ten tribes to the north. Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, and former official during the reign of Solomon, had been in exile in Egypt but he returned shortly after Solomon's death. He led the northern ten tribes of Israel in a rebellion and the kingdom was divided north and south. From this time forward, the northern kingdom became known as Israel, and the southern kingdom became known as Judah. Not only was this a political division of the monarchy, it was also shown to be God's punishment for the idolatry brought into the entire nation by Solomon during the latter part of his reign. Although there were times of peace and cooperation between the north and south, throughout the history of the Divided Monarchy there is frequent civil and military strife between the two sectors, along with economic and political problems.

Jeroboam and the Kingdom of Israel.

Jeroboam ruled the Kingdom of Israel (the northern kingdom) for twenty-two years. Not only was he the leader of the insurrection and first king of Israel, but he set the tone for many future kings. He was a very evil man, and many of the later kings of Israel are compared to him. The description is frequently found that a certain king "did evil in the eyes of the Lord, by following the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat which he had caused Israel to commit."

Since the capital city of the United Monarchy had been Jerusalem, in the south, the north actually had no political or religious structure or history of its own. Therefore Jeroboam had to begin from scratch to form an army, organize his administration, provide a substitute for the religious practices associated with the Jerusalem temple, and generally set up a kingdom. There were a few fortified cities in the north which Jeroboam inherited, the most important of which were Megiddo, in the central part of Israel, and Hazor just north of the Sea of Galilee. He selected Shechem as his capital (I Kings 12:25), but later moved the capital to Tirzah, about 10 miles further north. Later, during the reign of Omri (c. 885-874 B.C.), the capital was moved to Samaria where it remained until 722 B.C. when the Assyrians invaded Israel and destroyed Samaria.

The religious factors in the Kingdom of Israel (northern kingdom) played an important role in the early conduct of Jeroboam. Since the temple was located in Jerusalem, that city was the religious as well as political capital under David and Solomon. Jeroboam believed that his position would be weakened if the people of the northern kingdom made

frequent trips to Jerusalem for the many national religious feasts and other celebrations. See I Kgs. 12:25-33. He attempted to solve this potential difficulty by setting up of two religious shrines, each with a golden image of a calf. One was set up in Dan, in the northern part of the country, and one in Bethel, close to Israel's southern border with Judah. The use of a golden calf probably came from Jeroboam's experience while he was exiled in Egypt where the bull calf was an important religious symbol. He said to Israel "Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." (See I Kings 12:28-30.) By presenting things in this way he tried to link the shrine and its god to the exodus, the most significant event in the history of Israel.

In order to officiate at these shrines Jeroboam appointed priests on a volunteer basis from non-Levitical tribes in violation of the Law of Moses. The history of Israel seems to show that the people developed a strange view of God and the gods, by worshipping at these shrines, and others, but continuing to offer sacrifices to the Lord. They adopted the attitude that the God of Israel was more or less just another god in the pantheon, rather than either rejecting the Lord entirely or rejecting paganism entirely. This is especially evident in the writings of the prophets of the eighth century B.C.

Rehoboam, King of Judah

The decision of Rehoboam, Solomon's son, to increase the burdens of his subjects resulted in the rebellion of the ten northern tribes of Israel leaving only two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, in the south. Rehoboam reigned for seventeen years. Significant and very complex chronological problems arise during the period of the Divided Kingdom, and the dates given do not always reflect the exact length of a king's reign. For example, it is not clear from the chronology whether Solomon's death occurred in 930 B.C. or 922 B.C. Some of these discrepancies could be explained by the fact that ancient people frequently counted any part of a year of a king's reign as if it were a complete year, meaning that the first and last years of a king's reign may overlap those of his predecessor and also his successor, and therefore be counted as part of the reign of all three kings. In addition, in a few cases there may be possibilities of co-regencies, where a son ruled with his father during the father's closing years. There are scholars on all sides of this issue, and a final answer is not possible.

When Jeroboam led the insurrection resulting in the division of the kingdom, Rehoboam's first reaction was to bring them back by military force in order to preserve his kingdom. The prophet Shamaiah told him not to fight against Israel, because this was God's own doing. From this time until the Assyrian invasion of the North (722 B.C.) the Kingdom of Judah and Kingdom of Israel existed as separate political entities.

The beginning of Rehoboam's reign appeared to be just a continuation of his father's reign, except that the kingdom was divided. Solomon had allowed idolatry in Israel, and was himself a participant in worship of some of the heathen gods. Rehoboam did the same, and the record states that he allowed male prostitution, worship of the pagan gods in the high places, and set up Asherah poles on every high hill.

In spite of these things however, the religious climate in Judah was generally better than that in Israel. Many Israelites from every tribe in the north left and came south, abandoning their homes and land in order to get away from the apostasy of the North.

Within five years from the beginning of the rebellion, Rehoboam had abandoned much of the law of the Lord, and his apostasy brought God's punishment. Shishak, king of Egypt, invaded Jerusalem and other cities of the South, and took many of the gold treasures of the temple including the gold shields Solomon had placed there. On the walls of the great temple at Karnak in Upper Egypt, he gave an account of some of these exploits, claiming that he conquered or extracted tribute from more than one hundred fifty villages and cities of Palestine. Both Judah and Israel suffered from this invasion. Shishak also erected a monument (stele) in Megiddo celebrating his victories. Among the important cities he conquered were Megiddo and Debir, along with Solomon's refinery at Ezion-Geber. The cities of Lachish and Beth-shemesh, and some others in the south, could probably be added to these. One cannot help but wonder if the city of Gezer was on the list since that was the city which had been conquered by an Egyptian king who was the father of one of Solomon's wives. The king of Egypt then gave this city to his daughter as a wedding present. It is not clear however whether it was the daughter of Shishak whom Solomon married. She could have been the daughter of Shishak's predecessor.

A brief statement tells us that Rehoboam turned back to God in his later life. The verse says, "Because Rehoboam humbled himself, the Lord's anger turned from him, and he was not totally destroyed. Indeed, there was some good in Judah." II Chron. 12:12. When Rehoboam died, his son, Abijah became king.

Chapter XV

Other Kings of Israel and Judah

I Kings 15:1—16:20

Introduction

Various kings reigned in Israel following the rebellion. Most of them were evil, and carried on frequent wars with Judah. Occasionally the two kingdoms were allied against a common enemy. Many of the sections dealing with the activities of the kings end by saying that their deeds are recorded in the annals of the kings of Israel (or Judah). We do not have any of these books. The reigns of the kings of both North and South are described and dated in reference to each other. For example, I Kings 15:1 states, “In the eighteenth year of the reign of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, Abijah became king of Judah, and he reigned in Jerusalem three years.” In I Kings 15:25 it states, “Nadab son of Jeroboam became king of Israel in the second year of Asa king of Judah, and he reigned over Israel two years.” The books of I and II Chronicles give the activities of the kings of Judah, but not the kings of Israel except as they relate to Judah. In this chapter we will look briefly at a group of kings of Israel from the time of Jeroboam through Zimri, and in Judah from Rehoboam through Jehoshaphat.

Selected Kings of Israel

As stated previously, at the beginning of Jeroboam’s reign over the kingdom of Israel his capital city was Shechem. He soon moved it to Tirzah however, where it remained until the time of Omri, who established Samaria as the capital city. See I Kgs. 14:17 and 16:23.

The son of Jeroboam became ill, and Jeroboam told his wife to disguise herself and go to the prophet Ahijah to inquire about the prognosis of the child. There are similar names in this narrative, and it is easy to become confused with the story. Note that the son of Jeroboam was named Abijah (I Kings 14:1), and the prophet who prophesied against Jeroboam and his child was named Ahijah the Shilonite. In addition, the king of Judah who succeeded Rehoboam had the same name as Jeroboam’s child, Abijah. See I Kgs. 14:31. In the history of Israel and Judah there are duplicate or similar names which occur.

God told Ahijah the prophet that the wife of Jeroboam was coming, and he greeted and identified her immediately. Ahijah predicted that the child would die as soon as his mother returned and entered the house, and that disaster would come to the house of Jeroboam because of his sins. Every male of Jeroboam’s descendants would be cut off, and those of his family who died in the city would be eaten by dogs, and those who died in the country would be eaten by birds. The prophecy was fulfilled.

Nadab, son of Jeroboam succeeded his father as king of Israel. He was evil just as his father had been, and he reigned only two years, before being assassinated by Baasha. Baasha then quickly killed all of the descendants of Jeroboam and declared himself to be king of Israel. He reigned twenty-four years, and was also an evil king. The prophet Je-

hu, son of Hanani brought a message to Baasha, which was similar to that brought earlier by Ahijah against Jeroboam concerning his family. (Later one of the kings of Israel was named Jehu, but was a different person from the prophet named Jehu.)

Elah, son of Baasha succeeded his father as king of Israel, and he followed in his father's footsteps to become a very evil king. He reigned for just two years, and was assassinated by Zimri, one of the officers in charge of half of the chariots of Elah's army. Zimri immediately destroyed the entire family of Baasha, and declared himself king of Israel.

Zimri however, reigned only seven days. When word came to the army of Israel that Zimri had assassinated Elah and destroyed the family of Baasha, the army responded by proclaimed Omri, a military officer, as a rival king. The Israelite army then marched to Tirzah, the capital city, laying siege to the city. When Zimri saw his fate, he set fire to the citadel, committing suicide in the flames. The death of Omri his son Ahab became king.

Selected Kings of Judah

During the two hundred year period of the Kingdom of Israel, there were nineteen kings and nine dynasties, but throughout the three hundred thirty-five year history of Judah it had twenty kings and only one dynasty, that of David. Abijah, the son of Rehoboam ruled for three years in Jerusalem, and was as evil as his father Rehoboam. However, II Chronicles 13:1-22 speaks of his appeal to Jeroboam and the north to come back to serve God, and reunite the nation. This reunion never occurred, and Jeroboam attacked the forces of Abijah. Abijah defeated the army of Jeroboam, inflicting heavy damage on Jeroboam and his army.

Upon the death of Abijah, Asa, his son reigned over Judah for forty-one years. He was one of the few righteous kings of Judah, and instituted religious reforms. He expelled male prostitutes, deposed his grandmother for making an Asherah pole (which Asa cut down and burned), and brought the silver and gold articles back into the temple. Later however, in order to secure the cooperation of Syria against Baasha, king of Israel, Asa gave many of these items of gold and silver to Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, asking him to break his treaty with Baasha, and fight with him (Asa) against Baasha. Ben-Hadad agreed to cooperate with Asa.

Asa's son, Jehoshaphat, succeeded to the throne of Judah, while Ahab, the son of Omri, was king of Israel. Jehoshaphat reigned for twenty-five years, and was a righteous king. See I Kings 22:41-50. An interesting marriage had taken place between the family of Jehoshaphat and that of Ahab. Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, married Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, the king of Israel. Later this presented a very peculiar situation in Judah, which will be discussed in Chapter XVI.

From the time of Jeroboam (in Israel) and Rehoboam (in Judah) until the reign of Ahab (in Israel) and Jehoshaphat (in Judah), much of the history of each of these kingdoms is one of intrigue, assassinations, evil, and apostasy. Judah had a few kings who were the

exceptions. For the most part, corruption, immorality, and idolatry characterize the kings of both north and south. Even the reform efforts in Judah under Asa, Jehoshaphat, and others were neither complete nor lasting.

Chapter XVI

Omri and Ahab, Kings of Israel

Elijah the Prophet

I Kings 16:21-33, 17:1-6,
18:16—19:18, 22:1-53

Introduction

Omri was the founder of one of Israel's most powerful and long lasting dynasties, encompassing the reign of four kings. He made alliances with Phoenicia and Judah, and controlled the country of Moab. Chronologists calculate the dates of these kings differently, some believing that the Omri dynasty should be dated from 876 B.C. until 842 B.C., which would give only thirty-four years for the reign of all four kings of the dynasty. Others calculate it from 885 B.C. until 841 B.C., giving forty-four years for the four kings. Counting the possibility of overlapping years at the beginning and ending of each king, the latter calculation (885-841) fits the Biblical record more closely.

The deterioration of Israel's loyalty to God can be seen in the nation's increased loyalty to Baal, the pagan god of the Canaanites. The stories of Omri, Ahab, and Elijah give us an insight into the economic, political, and religious aspects of Israelite life during a very important part of the Divided Monarchy.

Beginning of the Omride Dynasty

A state of anarchy prevailed just prior to the beginning of the reign of Omri. He was acclaimed king by about half of the population, but a third aspirant to the throne, Tibni, created a brief period of civil war between his forces and those of Omri. Tibni was overcome and killed.

The kings of this dynasty were Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, and Jehoram, but only Omri and Ahab were really considered successful. This was one of the most significant economic and military periods of Israelite history, but was also a time when Israelite idolatry grew rapidly. The land of Israel became known to neighboring countries as the "Land of Omri." It is evident that Omri maintained friendly ties with Judah, and, as previously stated, a political marriage took place later between the North and the South when Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab (Omri's son), King of Israel married Joram, the son of Jehoshaphat, King of Judah. See II Chronicles 18:1.

Ahab married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, the king of the Sidonians (the Phoenicians). This also has all of the trappings of a political marriage, and led to many religious problems for Israel. The alliance between Omri and the Phoenicians, created a great economic boon to both nations, but ultimately proved disastrous for the Omride dynasty and to the nation of Israel. The international influence of Omri is demonstrated by the fact that the Assyrian annals continue to refer to Samaria as the "house of Omri" for a century after his death.

There is every reason to believe that Omri was a vigorous, effective and successful ruler both economically and politically. Religiously both he and his son Ahab were extremely evil however. Both were known for their lavish life style. In the ruins of the palace of Omri in Samaria, archaeologists have uncovered beds inlaid with ivory and many other evidences of the extravagance of Omri and Ahab. During this time Israel became internationally recognized as a very prosperous nation, as shown in the inscriptions of the Assyrians, Moabites, and other nations.

Ahab, King of Israel

Ahab succeeded his father Omri, ruling Israel twenty-two years (c. 874-853 B.C.). I Kgs. 16:29-33. The evil and corrupt policies of Omri were continued by his son, Ahab, and the affluence of the upper class grew more pronounced as it was contrasted with the plight of the poorer people. Ahab's marriage to Jezebel, the Phoenician princess, assured continued friendly relations with Phoenicia, and indirectly guaranteed strong international commercial activity.

The Old Testament does not give a complete picture of Israel's problems with Syria, but there is an indirect reference to the fact that the father of Ben-Hadad, the Syrian king, had invaded some of the cities of Israel, and was occupying them. Also, Syria and a coalition of thirty-two kings besieged the city of Samaria, sending an ultimatum in which he threatened to take all of Ahab's treasures, and his wives and children. Ahab resisted, defeating the Syrian coalition, but Ben-Hadad, the king escaped. The following spring he engaged Ahab again, but this time on the plains (probably the Plain of Esdraelon) rather than on the hills, since the Syrians believed Israel's gods were "gods of the hills," and would not be able to defend them if they were engaged in war in the plains. Once again the Syrians were defeated, but, contrary to ancient customs, Ahab made a treaty with Ben-Hadad allowing him to live. The conditions of this treaty provided that the cities the Syrians had captured in Israel would be returned, and the Syrians were to provide certain commercial privileges for Israel in Damascus. A prophet told Ahab that God was displeased with him for releasing Ben-Hadad, because God had determined that he should die. Ahab was then told that he himself would die as punishment. See I Kings 20:1-34.

The Threat of Assyria

Beginning about 883 B.C., Assyria was rising in power under the leadership of its brutal ruler Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 B.C.), who had his eyes on the Phoenicians, the Syrians, and the Israelites. The reason for Assyria's interest in those nations was probably because they constituted an opening to the Mediterranean Sea. The Battle of Qarqar (sometimes spelled Karkar) played a significant role in Israel's history although it is not recorded in the Old Testament. The battle took place in 853 B.C. and is recorded on the Black Obelisk of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (859-824 B.C.), as part of his conquests. Qarqar is located about 100 miles due north of Damascus. The Obelisk was discovered in 1845 in the city of Calah on the Tigris River, near the modern day city of Baghdad. On it are inscribed some interesting items bearing on Old Testament history. Shalmaneser III lists some of his wars and some of his enemies, Syria (under Ben-Hadad) and

Israel (under King Ahab) being among them. The Obelisk states that “2,000 chariots and 10,000 infantrymen” were led by “Ahab the Israelite.” Although Shalmaneser claimed victory, he temporarily withdrew from the area, not capturing Damascus or marching into Israel. This seems to indicate that his victory was not decisive. Ancient royal inscriptions, such as that which is on the Black Obelisk, seldom admitted defeat or indecisive battles of their own king.

The Battle of Ramoth Gilead

It was in this battle that Ahab met his death. The city of Ramoth Gilead was located about 25 miles east of the Jordan River and about 25 miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee. This meant that it was located at the border between Syria and Israel. The Syrians had captured and occupied it for about three years meaning that the old treaty which Ahab had made between Israel and Syria apparently had been dismantled.

Jehoshaphat, King of Judah was visiting Ahab in Samaria, and Ahab enlisted his cooperation in a battle to recapture Ramoth Gilead. Jehoshaphat asked that the prophets first be consulted. Four hundred prophets were brought, and they said the Lord would bring victory to Ahab and to Israel. Jehoshaphat was not satisfied with the prediction of the prophets, possibly believing they were “yes-men” for the king. He then asked that another prophet be consulted. This was Micaiah, a prophet about whom we know nothing more. Ahab expressed his personal dislike for Micaiah because he never brought good news to Ahab. Micaiah predicted that the battle would be lost, and Ahab would be killed. Ahab went into the battle in full armour, but a chance arrow pierced him between the sections of his armor, and he died from the wound.

Ahaziah, the son of Ahab became king of Israel, and ruled for only two years. Ahaziah had no son, so Joram, another son of Ahab succeeded Ahaziah as king, but his tenure was also very short.

A strange and confusing situation took place at this time. Ahaziah, the son of Ahab succeeded his father as king of Israel. However, he fell through a lattice in an upstairs room and died of his injuries. He had no son to succeed him so Joram, also a son of Ahab became king of Israel.

At this same time as Israel had kings named Ahaziah and Joram, Judah had two kings of the same names only in the reverse order – Joram and then Ahaziah. The name Joram is the same as the name Jehoram, and both names are used in the text. Joram of Israel had made an alliance with Ahaziah of Judah to fight against the Syrians again at Ramoth-Gilead. Joram, of Israel was wounded, and had gone to the city of Jezreel to recover. While Ahaziah of Judah was visiting him in Jezreel, Jehu arrived and killed both of them. Beginning at this time, Jehu led a blood-bath, resulting in the death of the entire family and descendants of Ahab, including his wife Jezebel. But Jehu did not stop with Ahab’s family. He also killed the chief men, close friends, and priests of Ahab. See II Kings 9:14-29 and II Kings 10:1-11.

These kings can be shown in this way:

Kings of Israel: Omri → Ahab → Ahaziah → Joram (a.k.a. Jehoram) → Jehu. These kings covered the period from c. 885 until 814 B.C., but there is some question about the exact dates. The death of Joram of Israel, the last king of the Omride Dynasty, took place about 841 B.C. The Omride Dynasty then covered approximately forty-four years, from c. 885 until c. 841. Jehu, Joram's successor, ruled for seventeen years, until about 814 B.C.

Kings of Judah: Asa → Jehoshaphat → Joram (a.k.a. Jehoram) → Ahaziah. These kings covered the period from approximately c. 911 until 841 B.C., and comprised father-son successions.

Non-Literary Prophets of this Period

The word prophet does not refer simply to a person who predicts future events, but its basic meaning is one who speaks for another. The word is also used in contemporary circumstances to describe those who have keen insight into the consequences of political, moral, and religious trends, though not as messengers of God. Although the word has rather broad usages in the Bible as well as secular texts, the prophets of the Old Testament were those who brought God's messages of warning and exhortation to the people. True, in some cases they predicted future events, but this was a relatively minor part of their ministry. Their messages were strong condemnation of the sins of the people, warnings of the consequences of those sins, and exhortations to return to God. They spoke frequently of the punishment for disobedience, dealing with the social, moral, political, and economic factors as well as the religious factors in the lives of God's people.

The non-literary prophets were simply those who left no writings. There are quite a few of these prophets who are sometimes named and at other times remain anonymous. Some appear only briefly in the narrative while others are more prominent. These prophets appeared on the scene at various times as part of the ongoing history of Israel and Judah. Among the better known non-literary prophets are Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha. In Samuel's case, he fulfilled a minor political role, but a very active religious role, while Elijah and Elisha served more strictly in a religious role as spokesmen for God. There were also schools of the prophets where men were trained to proclaim God's word. It could be said that the prophets of the Old Testament were the preachers of their day. During the period of the Divided Monarchy both literary and non-literary prophets flourished. At times, the historical narrative will be interrupted to give information on some of the non-literary prophets. See I Kgs. 17:1—19:21 and II Kgs. 1:1—2:25, 4:1—8:15.

The Work of Elijah

Immediately after the writer of I Kings introduces us to Ahab, the son and successor of Omri, he brings in Elijah, one of the most interesting characters in the entire Old Testament. (See I Kgs. 17:1-19:21.) Jezebel, the Sidonian wife of Ahab, was a strong devotee of Baal, and during Ahab's reign her religious influence was unswerving. Ahab had

built a temple to Baal in Samaria, and set up an altar to him. In addition, he set up an Asherah pole, the symbol of the Canaanite fertility goddess. All of these were very discouraging to Elijah who seemed to be rebuffed at every turn.

Very early in his ministry, Elijah announced to Ahab that there would be no rain except by his (Elijah's) word. This was a direct affront against the god Baal along with his worshippers – Jezebel and many Israelites – since Baal was the god of fertility, storms and weather and he supposedly controlled rain and storms. The drought lasted for three years, and the entire country suffered. Of course, Elijah was blamed for this, and Ahab referred to him as the “troubler of Israel.”

Elijah and the Contest on Mt. Carmel

The religious conditions in Israel during the reign of Ahab form an important part of Israel's history. The influence of Jezebel had accentuated the worship of Baal. Through much of its history, Israel was attracted to, and strongly influenced by Baal worship, and during the entire reign of Ahab, Elijah was constantly challenging him on religious grounds, and challenging the entire nation to return to God.

The contest on Mt. Carmel is one of the most dramatic confrontations in the history of the Divided Monarchy. Elijah challenged Ahab to gather the prophets of Baal to Mt. Carmel, near the modern day city of Haifa, Israel, and he would meet them there. Each would call upon their god to miraculously bring fire down to consume a sacrifice prepared for that purpose. The god who answered with fire would be declared the true God of Israel. Four hundred fifty prophets of Baal were summoned, along with the people of Israel, to meet Elijah. At the victorious conclusion Elijah announced an end of the three year drought. Be sure to read the details of the encounter in I Kings 18:16-46.

In spite of this very spectacular demonstration of God's sovereignty, when news of the victory of God over Baal reached Jezebel she was furious, and vowed to have Elijah killed. This of course, was very discouraging to Elijah, and he concluded that devotion to God had ceased in Israel. He had to flee from the wrath of Jezebel going southward to Horeb in the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula. In his discouragement he complained to God that “The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.” God's response was, “I reserve seven thousand in Israel – all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal, and all whose mouths have not kissed him.” See I Kings 19:9-18. After a series of encounters with God the Lord sent Elijah to Syria to anoint Hazael as king of Syria, and to anoint Jehu as king of Israel. See I Kings. 19. The entire story of Elijah needs to be read in order to see the character of one of the greatest men in Old Testament history. See I Kgs. 19:1-20.

Chapter XVII

The Kings and the Prophets

II Kings 2:1-18, 5:1-14, 8:16—9:33 17:1-41

Introduction

Elisha was the successor of Elijah, but their ministries were quite different. Most of Elijah's work centered around the king, and opposition to Baalism on a national level. The ministry of Elisha on the other hand centered mostly on working with individuals. Both of these men are classified with the non-literary prophets of Israel.

The Work of Elisha

Although Ahab had been killed in the battle of Ramoth-Gilead, Jezebel, his wife, continued to live in Israel. There can be little doubt that she exerted strong influence over her sons Ahaziah and Joram after the death of Ahab, particularly in matters of Baal worship. See below concerning her death. In II Kings 2 we have the story of Elijah's being taken to heaven in a chariot of fire, and shortly after that Elisha is seen ministering during the reign of Joram, Ahab's son.

From the time of Omri, Israel had dominated the country of Moab, and Moab had paid taxes to Israel throughout those years. During the reign of Joram, Ahab's son who replaced Ahaziah, Moab rebelled against Israel and Joram requested assistance from Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and the king of Edom to subdue Moab once again. II Kings 3. Elisha instructed them to dig trenches which filled with water. At sunrise the next morning the reflection of the sun on the water made the Moabites think it was blood, concluding that the coalition forces of Israel, Judah, and Edom had begun fighting each other, and had massacred each other. Thinking they could go in and take the spoil, the Moabites rushed to the Israelite camp, only to be met by the armies of Israel, Judah, and Edom. The three kings fought and subdued them, and conquered additional territory.

When Moab saw that it was on the verge of defeat, Mesha, the king of Moab offered his own son as a sacrifice to Chemosh, the Moabite god. The Moabites rallied and escaped from the wrath of the three-king coalition but the coalition had already destroyed many of the towns of the Moabites. See II Kings 3:14-27. 8.

Elisha sent one of his own men to anoint Jehu, a commander in Israel's army, to be king although Joram, Ahab's son was still king of Israel at this time. Israel was engaged in a battle against the Syrians, and Joram, king of Israel was at the battle along with Ahaziah the king of Judah who was his ally. Jehu was a worshipper of God, and a strong opponent of the worshippers of Baal. Elisha had instructed him to exterminate the entire family Ahab, for God had told Ahab that his bloodline would be destroyed. Jehu drove his chariot toward the city of Jezreel, about twenty-five miles southwest of the Sea of Galilee. Both Ahaziah and Joram were in the city at that time, having come from the second battle against the Syrians at Ramoth-Gilead. They went out to meet Jehu, and he killed

both Ahaziah and Joram. Later Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, was thrown out of a tower and was killed. Her body was eaten by dogs.

Selected Kings of Judah Prior to 722 B.C.

As previously noted, Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, king of Israel, had married Joram, the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. Joram and Athaliah became the parents of Ahaziah who became the king of Judah at the time of his father's death. (Remember that at this time there were duplicate names of kings in Israel and Judah. There was Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, who was king of Israel and Ahaziah, the son of Jehoram, who was king of Judah (See II Kgs. 8:25-27.) Athaliah was an ardent devotee of Baal. Upon hearing that Jehu had killed her son Ahaziah, king of Judah (II Kgs. 9:21-29), she decided to destroy all of her own grandchildren so there would be no descendant to occupy the throne of Judah. Joash, the one year old son of Ahaziah, however, was taken away, along with his nurse, and hidden for six years to escape Athaliah's purge. When he was seven years old he was presented to Jehoiada, the priest, and he was crowned king. Athaliah heard about this, and came to the temple shouting "Treason." She was captured, taken out of the temple area and killed. Joash turned out to be a reformer, and did much to bring Judah back to God. See II Kgs. 11:1-21.

In II Kgs. 12:1-16 we read of the religious reforms of Joash. The temple had fallen into disrepair during the years prior to Joash, and he began a project to repair it. Under the strong guidance of Jehoiada the priest, Joash did many other things to reinstitute loyalty to God and wipe out the idolatrous worship of the people of Judah. Near the close of the reign of Joash, Hazael, king of Syria (Aram) attacked Gath (a city of the Philistines in the southern part of Palestine). In that attack Hazael had to go through Judah. Joash gave him gifts of gold from the temple, apparently as the price for his withdrawal, and he left Jerusalem.

In II Chronicles 24:17-27 we have information on the closing years of the reign of Joash showing some of his evil side. His officials conspired against him, and assassinated him. He reigned for forty years. In II Kgs. 12:19-21 we are told that Joash was assassinated by some of his officials and his son Amaziah succeeded him and he followed the reforms of his father. A conspiracy developed against him and he was also assassinated. His son Azariah became king of Judah.

Azariah, also known as Uzziah, was one of the longest reigning kings of Judah. See II Kings 15:1-7 and II Chron. 26:1-23. He was partly contemporary with Jeroboam II, King of Israel. Azariah did much to restore the worship of God, following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather. He restored some of the grandeur of the time of Solomon, and was also successful in military endeavors, subduing the Philistines who had once again become a threat to Israel. His military strength and rebuilding of fortifications gained him respect from many other nations, including Egypt. He was among the first to introduce advanced war machines. However, just as many before him, his power became a source of personal pride, and he usurped the office of the priest, officiating in the burning of incense which was unlawful for him to do. When confronted by the priests he became

angry, and God punished him by an outbreak of leprosy while he was in the temple. For the remainder of his life, he and was forced to live in a separate house.

Joram, the son of Azariah succeeded his father as king of Judah. He continued many of the reforms of his forefathers dating back to Joash. He was followed by his son, Ahaz who was a very evil king. Ahaz was king of Judah at the time that Assyria invaded and destroyed Samaria, bringing the kingdom of Israel to a close. See the section below for details on the Assyrian invasion of Israel. This brings us to about 715 B.C.

The Assyrian Threat

Although Assyria's influence was not substantial during the reign of David (1000 – 961 B.C.), the gradual increase of the empire during the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. meant that Assyria soon became the dominant power in the Middle East. The Assyrians were particularly known in history for their torture and brutality against their enemies. The Harvard archaeologist, G. Ernest Wright says: "From this time forth the Assyrian kings describe their exploits in similar vein. Their armies were so powerful that none could withstand them. Their rapacious cruelty was so terrible that the hatred of them spilled over into the literature of a people as far away as Judah (cf. Nahum, chapters 2 to 3 and Jonah)." (G. Ernest Wright, *Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible*, p. 72.)

Assyria continued to rise in power, and between 740 and 732 B.C. their armies invaded Damascus and continued the westward expansion of its empire. This played an important role in Israel's troubles. About ten years later (722 B.C.) the Assyrians also invaded Samaria, Israel's capital the city, taking many of its inhabitants captive. This destroyed the Kingdom of Israel, the people were scattered among other nations, and they are now referred to as "the lost tribes of Israel." They never returned to reestablish their nation.

The Assyrian Captivity of Israel

The chronology of the period from Jehu (c. 842 B.C.) to Menahem (c. 745 B.C.) is very complex and it is not possible to affix exact dates to many of the kings and events during that time period. However, Assyrian documents speak of the death of Shalmaneser V, who laid siege to Samaria, and the rulership of Sargon II, his successor who completed the siege. From these sources chronologists can fix the date of Assyria's invasion and destruction of Samaria at 722 B.C.

Let's go back and look at the events which led up to the Assyrian Captivity of Israel. In II Kgs. 15:27 – 16:20 we have the account of Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, invading portions of the Kingdom of Israel around Galilee and deporting some of the inhabitants of those towns. This took place while Pekah was king of Israel probably between 740 and 732 B.C. In II Kgs. 16:5-9 we are told that Pekah joined with Resin, the king of Syria and the two armies attempted an invasion of Jerusalem. Ahaz was king of Judah at that time and his army successfully resisted the attempt. However, for his own protection, King Ahaz appealed to Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria for help, offering considerable

treasures in exchange for his cooperation. This policy of appeasement was apparently a survival technique, but it made Judah the vassal of Assyria.

While Ahaz was king of Judah, Pekah, king of Israel was assassinated by a conspiracy led by Hoshea who then became king of Israel. (Do not to be confused king Hoshea with Hosea the prophet.) He reigned about nine years until 722 B.C. As stated above, Israel had been paying heavy taxes to the Assyrians but Hoshea decided to bring an end of this burden. He made overtures to Egypt for help, but when Shalmaneser V king of Assyria (727-722 B.C.) discovered this, he considered it treason. In 724 B.C. Shalmaneser laid siege to Samaria, Israel's capital city, and it fell two years later in 722 B.C.

Assyrian inscriptions show that this was part of Assyria's general plan of conquest and expansion. As they conquered a variety of countries they deported the most educated and skillful, transplanting them in other conquered nations. The unskilled and unproductive people were left in their own land and people from other nations were transplanted into a recently conquered country, such as Israel, where they intermarried with the remaining native populations. Secular history shows us that this was done in order to destroy a basic spirit of unity and nationalism in the conquered countries thus preventing rebellions from within those nations. These kinds of intermarriages within Israel created a mixed race of people who became known later as the Samaritans. See II Kings 17 for an explanation of why Israel was taken captive, and the repopulation of the country.

Apparently Shalmaneser died during the siege and he was succeeded by Sargon II who completed the destruction of the city. He made captives of the educated and skilled workmen among the Israelites, taking them to Assyria and Media. Only the poor, the unskilled, and uneducated were left in the land. This invasion brought to an end of the Kingdom of Israel. History, both Biblical and secular, gives no further information concerning the people taken captive by the Assyrians. However, those left in the land who intermarried with the foreigners ultimately played an important role in the later history of Judah and the Jews of New Testament times. As stated above, these became known as the Samaritans.

Sargon II

Sargon II succeeded the Assyrian king, Shalmaneser V, who died during the siege of Samaria. However, the reference to "Sargon, king of Assyria" in Isaiah 20:1 was the only place in all literature, including the histories of Assyria, in which the name of king Sargon appeared. A Mesopotamian king by that name ruled Akkadia in about 2335 B.C., but this places him sixteen hundred years earlier than the Assyrian king Sargon.

In 1843 Paul Emile Botta, a French consular agent stationed in Mosul, Iraq was searching for the ancient city of Nineveh. He was digging at the mound of Khorsabad, about 14 miles northeast of Mosul. Botta did not discover Nineveh, but he succeeded in digging up ruins of a city which had been founded by a hitherto unknown Assyrian king named Sargon.

Botta's discovery produced lavish treasures, information on the palace, and other important artifacts. It was the first non-Biblical authentication of an ancient Assyrian king by that name. These discoveries included descriptions of Sargon's palace and other important documents. Further excavations by the French government in 1851, and the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago in 1928 and 1936 resulted in further excavation of Sargon's palace. These excavations produced Sargon's Annals, and numerous other valuable artifacts, treasures, statues and reliefs. As a result of these excavations scholars now have a relatively complete history of Sargon's reign, an official list of kings of Assyria from very ancient times, and numerous inscriptions and other valuable data. Much of this is now in the British Museum in London.

Isaiah dates one of his oracles by stating, "In the year that the supreme commander, sent by Sargon king of Assyria, came to Ashdod and attacked and captured it – at that time the Lord spoke through Isaiah." In the Annals of Sargon discovered by Botta, Sargon mentions this same incident as in Is. 20:1-2. The Annals also give information on the policies of Assyria concerning captives from conquered nations.

Introducing Some Literary Prophets

The literary prophets were those who left their writings which make up the last seventeen books of the Old Testament – Isaiah through Malachi. During the time period just discussed most of the literary prophets did their work. However, a few lived during the Babylonian Exile and the Post Exilic Period. The first five of these prophetic books, Isaiah through Daniel are the longest, and are designated the Major Prophets and the final twelve are shorter and are designated "Minor Prophets." The terms "Major" and "Minor" refer only to their length, not to their content, importance, or authority. Although we do not know exact dates for all of these writings, most of this writing was done from about the eighth century B.C. until the fourth B.C. Ezekiel and Daniel, lived and wrote during the Babylonian Exile and some others including Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi lived and wrote during the Post-Exilic Period.

Many people assume that the Old Testament prophetic books are primarily devoted to predictions of future events such as the second coming of Christ, the return of Israel to its native land, and other contemporary or near contemporary events. However, very little space in the prophetic writing is devoted to any kind of predictions. Instead, the prophetic writings are intensely practical dealing primarily with the religious, moral, ethical and sometimes political problems of their day. The writers speak out strongly against the wealthy and powerful who abused the poor and less fortunate, the people who neglected widows and other dependents, immorality, and the general apostasy of God's people. The moral and ethical conditions against which the Old Testament prophets spoke so vehemently are almost identical to those which exist in our own twenty-first century society. It has been said that "The prophetic writings of the Old Testament, particularly the Minor Prophets, are as contemporary as tomorrow's newspaper."

Archaeological discoveries have shown that, for the most part, the economic situation during the period of the Divided Kingdom was almost ideal in both Israel and Judah. A

strong economy led to a state of affairs in which the rich became very rich, and the poor became very poor. In too many cases the wealth of the wealthy was attained by business and governmental corruption, gross abuse of the poor and those who had little or no legal recourse. The threats from neighboring nations, such as Syria, Assyria, and Babylon only led Israel and Judah to rely more strongly on their own physical prowess, economic success, and military might rather than relying on God.

As is the case in contemporary society, success led to arrogance and arrogance led to lavish lifestyles and a complete separation of true religious devotion from everyday life. They exchanged the essence of religion for the mere symbols of religion. The prophets spoke strongly against this. It is as if the ancient Israelites said, "I offer my sacrifices regularly and I keep all of the rituals. That makes me OK." Translating this into today's culture we might say, "I go to church every Sunday morning and give my money. That makes me OK." The people to whom the prophets addressed their writings were "very religious," but, at the same time, "very immoral and unethical." They were outwardly pious, making sure that sacrifices were observed, and that the forms and ceremonies of their religion were carried out. However, they never allowed their religion to invade their hearts, change their character, or make them more compassionate and truly godly people. They forgot the covenant which their nation had made with God, they forsook the covenant law which the Lord had given them, and the voice of God's spokesmen – the prophets – fell on deaf ears. Many of the people continued to worship God, but seemed to believe that the Lord was just one more deity in the heathen pantheon. The shell of their religion was present, but its life had been drained out. The Canaanite religions, with their immoral fertility rites, were accepted and practiced, and the Israelite priests became part of the corruption. This degenerate condition was widespread in both Israel and Judah and ultimately led to the downfall of both. It was into this environment that two very interesting and important prophets – Amos and Hosea – made their entry. Below, we will briefly discuss these two prophets.

A Brief Review of the Historical Background

We have seen Jezebel, the Phoenician wife of King Ahab of Israel, as a strong devotee of the god Baal. The Queen had a very significant influence on the religious life of Israel. Jehu, purged the house of Ahab, killing the entire family and all descendants. Jehu then became king of Israel. This purge may have alienated the Phoenicians, who had been friendly to Israel in the past. Syria continued to be a threat to Israel, as it had been in the past, and the Phoenicians were probably no longer allies of Israel. Prior to the reign of Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 B.C.), king of Assyria, governmental problems among the Assyrians had given Israel a period of respite from Assyrian expansionism toward the west. This was short lived however. Syria was also an active threat to Israel, capturing a great deal of Israel's territory.

Ashurnasirpal II conducted an intensive and brutal drive toward the Mediterranean coastal nations introducing a sort of Assyrian reign of terror. This incursion was continued by the successor Assyrian kings including the invasion of parts of Syria, Phoenicia, Israel, and Judah. In the previous chapter we referred to the Black Obelisk of Shal-

maneser III (king of Assyria, 859-824 B.C.). It shows Jehu, king of Israel, paying tribute to Shalmaneser III. In the text of the Obelisk, Jehu is specifically identified.

During part of this period Israel was experiencing political chaos, with a rapid turnover of kings. Over a relatively brief period of time, four Israelite kings were assassinated. Zechariah, who succeeded Jeroboam II, was assassinated by Shallum who reigned only one month. Menahem assassinated Shallum and ruled for about 8 years, and died in peace. Pekahiah, the son of Menahem ruled only one year, when he was murdered by Pekah who was an Israelite military commander and a strong anti-Assyrian soldier. Pekah became king of Israel.

The Prophet Amos

This is the general environment into which the prophets Amos and Hosea are introduced. Amos dates his work during the reign of Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam II, king of Israel. Uzziah began his reign in Judah about 792 B.C. For the most part was a very righteous king. Once again there are difficult chronological problems because we are not given the details of the possibilities of co-regencies (father and son) or the method of calculating a king's reign. (If a king reigned only a part of a year it was usually recorded as a year.) Jeroboam II reigned in Israel during part of this time. He was an extremely evil king, being very deficient in social, religious, and moral values. Amos and Hosea were partly contemporary with each other and had much in common as they attack these problems in Israel.

We know almost nothing about the personal background of the prophet Amos except that he says he had been a shepherd and a keeper of sycamore trees in the small village of Tekoa, a few miles south of Jerusalem. The keeping of sycamore trees was considered a rather lowly occupation. The fact that he saw himself as a simple man, not a "trained theologian" plays an important role a little later in his book. He says he was "not a prophet or a son of a prophet." The expression "the son of a prophet" probably refers to the practice of training prophets (preachers) for proclaiming godliness and holiness among the people. These trainees were called "sons of the prophets."

The Book of Amos

The book of Amos is divided into three major sections. The first is his oracles against the neighboring nations, 1:3—2:5. Each of these begins with the formula, "For three sins of _____, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath." Then he gives God's denunciation of the evils of that particular nation. This type of expression is used frequently by Hebrew poets, particularly in Proverbs. These nations which were condemned for their evil ways came in this order: first Syria (Damascus), followed by the Philistines (Gaza), then Phoenicia (Tyre), Ammon, Moab, and Judah. Having denounced the evil in each of the surrounding nations, including Judah, he begins his oracles against Israel in 2:6-16. There seems to be a psychological element here. The people of Israel could readily agree with the denunciations of each of the neighboring nations since they were enemies. Even the denunciation of Judah could have been interpreted in a very self-righteous way.

However, the rest of the book is a scathing oracle against Israel for its abuses of the poor, its complete lack of concern for justice for the underclass, and its disregard for the true meaning of their national covenant with God. Their religion was nothing more than a shell, and idolatry and immorality were the order of the day.

In the midst of Amos' visions of Israel's sins, there is an interesting encounter with Amaziah the priest at Bethel. See Amos 7:10-17. This is an interruption in the general flow of the book, but it makes an important contribution to its content. The king's sanctuary was in Bethel, where Amos was speaking, and no doubt the people who gathered for their sacrifices would not have expected scathing remarks from a shepherd/farmer such as Amos. He had publicly denounced the king (Jeroboam II) and his practices, saying that he would be killed, that Israel would go into captivity. When Amaziah the priest told Amos to leave Bethel, the king's sanctuary, and go back to tending his sheep and his little farm in Judah, Amos predicted that Jeroboam and his sons and daughters would all be killed, and his wife would become a prostitute. Following this encounter, Amos continues his oracles. Notice in the passages below the social injustices, business dishonesty, immorality, and corrupt religious practices.

The message of the book can be clearly seen in the following selected passages. 2:4-5, 2:6-8, 2:10-16, 3:10-11, 3:15, 4:4-5, 5:1-3, 5:6, 5:11-15, 5:21-24, 6:1-6, 7:1-6, 7:7-8, 7:10-17, and 8:1-8.

The Prophet Hosea and His Book

Since both Amos and Hosea lived and worked at approximately the same time, the historical background and the religious conditions are practically the same for the two books. Their messages are also quite closely connected, but their approach to the material and there emphasis is quite different. Hosea's appeal to the people is based on the love and compassion which God has for his people, and a reminder of the covenant they had with God. He presents God as one who deeply loves his people, and can't seem to bring himself around to destroying them. On the other hand, he is a just God, and cannot simply overlook the terrible character of their sins. Amos, on the other hand reminded Israel of God's judgment on the surrounding nations, and he told them that his God's wrath would come, not only to the nations around Israel, but also on Israel itself if the nation did not turn back to God.

Hosea sets the stage for his writing by telling the story of his marriage to Gomer. It is thought by some that this is a symbolic rather than a real marriage, and that Hosea uses the

figure of a marriage of himself and Gomer simply as a story to make his point. Whether a real marriage, or symbolism, the impact of the story is the same.

Gomer is a prostitute, but God instructs Hosea to marry her. They have three children, a daughter and two sons. God instructs Hosea to give each child a particular name, and each of these names is treated in a symbolic manner. His first son is named Jezreel. This

is also the name of the city where Jehu began his blood-bath against the house of Ahab and others. God says he is going to punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel. At the time Jehu was anointed king, God had told him that he was to destroy the household of Ahab. See II Kings 9:6-8. As we have already seen, Jehu went far beyond God's instructions, creating a massacre (II Kings 10:11), and God told Hosea the house of Jehu would be punished for this.

Next a daughter was born to Hosea and Gomer, and symbolically named Lo-Ruhamah, meaning "not loved." Hosea was told that this indicated that God said he would withdraw his love from Israel because of their violations of his covenant. The last child to be born to them was another son, who was symbolically named Lo-Ammi, which meant "not my people." The application was that God was no longer going to claim Israel as his own nation. This is seen in contrast to the Mt. Sinai Covenant where he constantly affirmed that of all the nations of the earth, Israel will be his people. But this was contingent upon their acceptance of, and adherence to the covenant, which Israel had miserably violated. A note of optimism is given here by Hosea when God says that Israel will be like the sands of the seashore for number, and hopefully would return to him. In the New Testament book of Romans, Paul cites this also as a prophetic predictive statement referring to the time when the Gentiles would turn to Christ. See Romans 9:25-29. Hosea uses these incidents to show God's love for his people, and rebuke them for departing from him. He warns them of the punishment and disasters which are to come to their nation as a result of their sins.

Apparently Gomer left Hosea, and became unfaithful to her marriage vows. In chapter 3 Hosea is told to go to his wife again, and he paid a price for her which was equal to about half of the price of a slave. Hosea loved her very deeply, and tried to woo her back, though she had many lovers. The marriage forms almost an allegory of God's relationship to and love for Israel, and this is the application Hosea makes of it. At this point, Hosea begins speaking of the many sins of the Israelites, their injustices, their abuses of the poor, their lack of covenant love for God, and their disregard for the law. The appeal is quite emotional, dotted here and there with God's reminiscences of his past relationship to Israel and his constant love for them in spite of their infidelity. Much of the great prosperity of the nation had been accomplished on the backs of the poor.

God is shown to be the provider of all of Israel's prosperity, but they had not recognized him as such. He tells how merchants used dishonest scales, and love to defraud the people. The nation boasted of its wealth but it had been gained by fraud. See Hosea 12:6-8. At times Israel would repent, but their repentance never lasted. "Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears." Hosea 6:4. In all of this, Israel was still worshipping and offering sacrifices to God, apparently thinking that the ritual is all that counts.

Important passages which demonstrate the message and theme of Hosea are found here: 1:1-10, 3:1-5, 4:1-2, 4:10-13, 5:1-5, 6:1-3, 6:4-6, 7:1-2, 8:7-10, 8:11-12, 10:4, 10:12, 11:1-9, and 12:6-10.

Chapter XVIII

The Kingdom of Judah

After 722 B.C.

II Kings 18:1—19:1-19, 19:35-37, 20:12-21,
II Chronicles 32:1-23 II Kings 22:1-13, 24:1—25:26

Introduction

We have previously explored the Kingdom of Israel from the time of the rebellion after the death of Solomon until the Assyrian captivity of the Kingdom of Israel. We have seen that during that time Israel experienced considerable economic prosperity and some military successes as well, but the period was also characterized by great corruption, insurrections, and social and religious decay, finally resulting in the Assyrian invasion and the fall of Samaria. We will now briefly explore conditions in the Kingdom of Judah from 722 B.C. (the year of the fall of the Kingdom of Israel) until the Babylonian Exile of Judah. The kingdom of Judah finally came to an end when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in a series of attacks beginning in 597 B.C. and ending in 587 B.C. This means that the Kingdom of Judah lasted about one hundred thirty-five years after the fall of Samaria.

Conditions in Judah

The general historical, social, moral, economic, and religious conditions during the approximate 200 year period of Israel's and Judah's coexistence (c. 922-722 B.C.) were almost identical. Apostasy was rampant in both kingdoms, although Judah had a number of reformer type kings while Israel had only one, Jehu. At times the northern and southern kingdoms warred against each other and their neighbors, and a few times they allied themselves to fight a common enemy, such as Syria. Judah, being the smaller of the two kingdoms, was not as strong militarily as Israel, and does not seem to have had the international stature of Israel, but its general condition was very similar. Shishak, king of Egypt, was a problem for Rehoboam king of Judah, but those Egyptian threats were not much of a problem for Jeroboam, king of Israel. The presence of the temple in Jerusalem seems to have been a unifying factor in Judah, although it did little to restrain practices of idolatry.

Kings of Judah after 722 B.C.

Without going into detail, it is important to mention a few of the kings of Judah, and their general character so we can see the basic make up of the South. Uzziah (AKA Azariah) was king of Judah during part of the ministry of Amos and Hosea in Israel. For the most part he was a godly king. Jeroboam II was king of Israel during part of this time but he was an evil king. Jotham succeeded his father Uzziah, and was also a righteous ruler of Judah, continuing some of his father's reforms. Still, much idolatry continued in the land.

Hezekiah

The interesting story of this king is in II Kgs. 18:1 – 20:21 and II Chron.29:1 – 32:33. When Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, came to the throne of Judah (715-687 B.C.) his country was a vassal of Assyria. This had a profound effect on the reign of Hezekiah. As a young twenty-five year old man, Hezekiah could remember Assyria's destruction of the kingdom of Israel, whose capital of Samaria was only about 40 miles north of Jerusalem. (See II Kgs. 18:1-4.) Hezekiah seemed to realize that religious reform could also create a foundation for political reform, and perhaps independence from the yoke of Assyria. Although his father had been a very evil king, Hezekiah became one of Judah's greatest reformers. He inherited an almost impossible situation from his father, and he had to pay the Assyrian tribute money by dismantling the treasures of the temple and the royal treasures in Jerusalem.

Hezekiah reopened the temple and reinstituted the observance of the holy days required in the Law. He even invited the Israelites left in the north to come to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover. Many responded to this overture. Keep in mind that Hezekiah came to the throne of Judah just seven years after the fall of the Kingdom of Israel to Assyria, so that tragedy was still a vivid memory in the minds of the people of Judah.

For the most part, the pagan people – particularly the rulers – of the Middle East could not conceive of a separation between their gods and the political and military interests of the nation. Remember that at the beginning of Hezekiah's reign Judah was a vassal of Assyria. Therefore, the religious reforms which he undertook would have been seen by the Assyrians as acts of rebellion and treason. Upon the death of Sargon II his son, Sennacherib V came to the Assyrian throne in about 705 B.C. In 1830 Colonel Robert Taylor an archaeologist, discovered a hexagonal prism in the ruins of ancient Nineveh. It brought important information to light concerning Sennacherib in which he mentions Hezekiah. The prism, known as the Sennacherib Prism and also the Taylor Prism is now at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. Of all Assyrian documents that have come down to us, not one is in a better state of preservation than this.

Assyrian records speak of the fact that Babylon, Egypt and Ethiopia, all rebelled against the Assyrians creating many problems for Sennacherib. Hezekiah took advantage of this and he also rebelled by refusing to pay taxes to the Assyrians. See II Kings 18:5-8. After quelling the rebellion of Babylon, Egypt, and Ethiopia, Sennacherib began invading a group of western cities subduing Phoenicia and other coastal provinces all the way down to the land of the Philistines. These exploits were very successful. His own account of these campaigns can be found on the Taylor Prism, which also details many of his other endeavors. On this prism Sennacherib describes the destruction of 46 cities and forts of Judah.

The Biblical record in II Kings 18-20 gives an interesting account of Hezekiah's encounter with the armies of Sennacherib. See also II Chronicles 29-32 for additional information. On the prism of Sennacherib the following inscription appears regarding his exploits in Palestine, particularly Judah.

As for Hezekiah the Jew, who did not submit to my yoke, 46 of his strong walled cities as well as the small cities in their neighborhood, which were without number – by constructing a ramp out of trampled earth, and by bringing up battering-rams, by the attack of infantry, by tunnels, breaches, and (the use of) axes I besieged and took (those cities). Two hundred thousand one hundred and fifty people great and small, male and female, horses, mules, asses, camels, cattle, and sheep without number, I brought away from them and counted as spoil. Himself [referring to Hezekiah] like a caged bird I shut up in Jerusalem, his royal city. (From *Atlas of the Bible Lands* C. S. Hammond and Co., publisher, p. B-15).

The Biblical account and that of the Greek historian Herodotus are not as glowing and favorable to the Assyrians as Sennacherib's account seems to be. The Assyrian army had been in Lachish, a southern Judean city, successfully subduing and destroying it. They came to Jerusalem and encamped outside the city, and sent threatening messages to Hezekiah. The prophet Isaiah told Hezekiah that God would deliver Jerusalem, and that the Assyrians would return to their own country. This took place by miraculous intervention. In II Kings 19:35 we have the story of how God afflicted the army with death. Herodotus, the ancient Greek historian says that at this time the Assyrian army was struck down by a plague of mice, (perhaps bubonic plague), resulting in numerous deaths, and forced them to return home. Sennacherib does not mention this in his inscriptions. When he returned to Nineveh, Sennacherib was assassinated by two of his sons while he was worshipping in the temple of a pagan god.

Hezekiah was preparing for a future onslaught by the Assyrians, but had a water problem. The water supply for at least a great part of Jerusalem came from the spring of Gihon, outside the city walls. The Old Testament account briefly mentions a tunnel constructed by Hezekiah's people to be a conduit for bringing the water into the city. See in II Kings 20:20 and II Chron. 32:30. By doing this, an invading army would not have a supply of water, but the city would. Because no details are given concerning its exact location and building, scholars had been at a loss to know very much about its location or construction. It was not until the discovery of the Siloam Inscription in 1880 that details of the tunnel were known. The discovery has shown it to be 1,777 feet long and it was hewn out of solid rock by workers working from each end – from the spring and also from the Pool of Siloam, its terminus.

An inscription known as the Siloam Inscription tells of the completion of the tunnel. This inscription was accidentally discovered by a small boy wading in the Pool of Siloam while his father, archaeologist A.H. Sayce, was working nearby. The child told his father of the writing carved into the wall, and Sayce deciphered it. This inscription turned out to be the key to the puzzle of Hezekiah's water tunnel.

The tunnel had been so completely filled up with rock that no one knew there was a tunnel there. Upon removal of the rocks the tunnel was discovered. The inscription was chiseled out of the rock and taken to the Turkish Archaeological Museum of Istanbul. The inscription tells of how they dug the tunnel. This is a translation of the inscription:

The boring through is completed. Now this is the story of the boring through. While the workmen were still lifting pick to pick, each toward his neighbor, and while three cubits remained to be cut through, each heard the voice of the other who called his neighbor, since there was a crevice in the rock on the right side. And on the day of the boring through the stone-cutters struck, each to meet his fellow, pick to pick; and there flowed the waters to the pool for a thousand and two hundred cubits, and a hundred cubits was the height of the rock above the heads of the stone-cutters. (M.F. Unger, *Archaeology and the Old Testament*, p. 274.)

Hezekiah's reforms were certainly among the most successful and thorough of any such efforts in Judah's history, yet his son Manasseh allowed most of his father's work to be revoked. Manasseh proved to be a disastrous ruler so far as the future of Judah was concerned. Although he reversed many of his religious positions late in his life (II Chron. 33:10-13), his son Amon, who ruled only two years, reverted to his father's evil ways. Amon was assassinated by a conspiracy of government officials. Between 654 and 648 B.C. the Babylonians led a revolt against the Assyrians. This signaled the beginning of the rapid decline of Assyrian power.

The Final Years of Judah

When Amon was assassinated, his son Josiah was made king. He was a child only eight years old when he began to rule, and his regency went from about 640 until 609 B.C. He was the ruler of Judah at the time that Nineveh was destroyed. Josiah purged Judah of its idols, instituted many religious reforms, and repaired the temple. Once again, it should be remembered that acts of religious reform would be considered by the Assyrians as acts of rebellion, since it deposed the gods of the Assyrian pantheon.

In the process of repairing the temple the book of the Law was discovered. After reading the Law and inquiring of the Lord through the prophetess Huldah, there was a great celebration of the Passover and a reinstituting of the Law.

Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria died, and the Assyrian Empire rapidly fell apart. Nabopolassar, king of the Babylonians declared independence from Assyria, and joined the Medes to attack and destroy Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. It fell in 612 B.C. after a lengthy siege. Although a number of aspiring and pretender kings arose, Assyria never regained its position. Instead, Babylon became the predominant power facing the nations of the Middle East. The city of Babylon is about 100 miles south of modern day Baghdad.

Meanwhile, Pharaoh Necho of Egypt, apparently believing that the Assyrians were preferable to the Babylonians, marched through Palestine to Carchemish in Syria to assist the remainder of the Assyrians in battle against Nebuchadnezzar, then captain of the Babylonian army of Nabopolassar, his father. The archaeological discovery of the Babylonian Chronicle provided scholars with excellent information concerning some of the events of this time period. The Chronicle is made up of a group of clay tablets, one of which was published in 1923 by C.J. Gadd and five others published in 1956 by J.D. Wiseman. They

tell about the rise of the Babylonian Empire, and have assisted greatly in establishing exact dates for some events. Nebuchadnezzar met and defeated Pharaoh Necho at the Battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C., but instead of bringing independence to Palestine as expected, it resulted in a trade-off – Assyrian domination was substituted for Babylonian domination. Josiah, king of Judah, attempted to stop Pharaoh Necho at Megiddo in Palestine, but he was killed in that battle. Nabopolassar, the father of Nebuchadnezzar died in Babylon while his son was out fighting the battles. Nebuchadnezzar returned home quickly to become king of the Babylonian Empire.

Once again Judah had to deal with an empire whose king was set on expansion toward the Mediterranean. Egypt feared the Babylonians, and fought a number of battles with them, some of which they won and others which they lost.

Pharaoh Neco of Egypt went up to the Euphrates River to assist a pretender king of the Assyrians in one of his battles. Josiah, king of Judah went to Megiddo to stop Neco but he was killed in the battle. His body was returned to Jerusalem where Jehoahaz his son was proclaimed king of Judah. In 609 B.C., just three years after the fall of Nineveh, the Pharaoh Neco invaded Judah and placed the kingdom under heavy taxation. He put King Jehoahaz in chains so that he could not rule. (II Kgs. 23:29-30.) The Egyptians then placed Eliakim another son of Josiah on the throne as a puppet king, changing his name to Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim also revolted. About this time Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army invaded Judah (II Kings 24:1-2), placing Jehoiakim under heavy taxation. This shows the tension which grew up between Babylon and Egypt for control of Judah. The prophet Jeremiah was ministering at this time and was completely involved in trying to get Judah to return to God. He was not successful.

Some of the Jews realized they had to make a choice of whether to pledge their loyalty to Egypt or to Babylonian. Jeremiah warned them not to go to Egypt, but a rather large group captured him and moved into Egypt with Jeremiah as their captive. See Jer.43:1-7.

Jehoiakim revolted against Nebuchadnezzar, which brought the Babylonian army to Jerusalem. The Babylonian Chronicle (see above) describes a battle between Egypt and Babylon which is not recorded in the Bible, but which shows Egypt the victor over the Babylonians. This may have given Jehoiakim courage to rebel against the Babylonians but it turned out to be disastrous for Judah, and brought about the deportation of Jehoiakim. See II Chron. 36:6.

Jehoiakim had a son named Jehoiachin. He became king in the place of his father who had been deported to Babylon. Jehoiachin was as evil as his father had been. A little more than three months later Nebuchadnezzar sent for Jehoiachin and brought him to Babylon. Zedekiah, his uncle, was installed as a puppet king. Zedekiah finally revolted against Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. This brought the Babylonian army to Jerusalem and Judah and the people suffered the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar. Not only did the Babylonians invade Jerusalem but they destroyed many cities and towns in the southern part of Judah. Jerusalem was destroyed and many of the people of Judah were taken captive. The Babylonian Chronicle shows that the final destruction of Jerusalem took

place during July and August, 587 B.C. These events, for all practical purposes, spell the final days of Judah's life as an independent nation. The Babylonian Exile resulted, and neither Israel nor Judah ever existed as independent nations again.

About seventy years later some of the exiles returned to Jerusalem but things had changed. An entirely different atmosphere prevailed – politically, economically, religiously, and socially.

Chapter XIX

The Babylonian Exile And Return

Daniel 2:1-49, 5:1-30, Psalms, 137,
Ezra 1:1-11, 4:1-5, Nehemiah 1:1—2:20

Introduction

The Babylonian captivity, also known as the Babylonian Exile, was an extremely difficult burden on most of the Jews, but for some it presented opportunity in business and government. The land of Judah was not left completely desolate – that is, with no inhabitants – but those who remained there were primarily the unskilled, uneducated, and poor.

The policy of the Babylonians concerning treatment of the conquered nations was different than that of the Assyrians. The Assyrians took the skilled, educated, and wealthy and disbursed them through out their own empire, leaving the unskilled, poor, and uneducated behind. Then they repopulated a newly conquered land with the poor, unskilled and uneducated they have taken from other conquered lands. By doing this they intended to break all bonds of nationalism and ethnic loyalty among the people. The Babylonians however took the educated and skilled into their own country to built it up, setting up businesses, working, and producing for the Babylonians. A few became government workers such as Daniel, and some others became entrepreneurs. However this did not mean that the plight of the exiled Jews was a happy one. Many of them became some and slaves. They were mistreated, punished, and ridiculed. Be sure to read Psalms 137, as well as some of the writings of Ezekiel to understand the plight of the Jews in exile. The picture is a grim one. The poorer, uneducated, and unskilled were left in Jerusalem and Judah. In their homeland they were heavily taxed by the Babylonians. The Exile is seen as the low point in Israel's history.

A General View of Life During the Exile

Through the work of Ezekiel and others, hope was firmly planted in the hearts of the exiled Jews, and many of them expected to return to their homeland. The land of Judah was not a very good place to live after Nebuchadnezzar's invasion, and those remaining in the land had a very difficult life. Virtually all of the towns of Judah, with the exception of those in the Negev seem to have been completely destroyed by Babylon. W.F. Albright, a noted archaeologist at Johns Hopkins University and former Director of the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem says, "Excavations in Judah since 1926 have shown with increasing weight of evidence that the Chaldaean destruction of Jewish towns was thorough-going and that few of them arose from their ruins." (William F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, p. 323.)

Using extra-Biblical sources, archaeologists have estimated the population of Judah in the eighth century B.C. at about 250,000. After the deportation it was about half of that. Many left later and went to Egypt and other countries such as Moab, Ammon, and Edom.

See Jeremiah 40:11. Jeremiah 41:5 shows that there was some sort of worship being conducted in Jerusalem, even in the midst of the ruins of the city. Sacrifices were being offered, perhaps on the site of the destroyed temple.

An important archaeological discovery was made between 1884 and 1900 with the excavation of Nippur, a city located about 50 miles southeast of Babylon, or about 125 miles south and slightly east of modern day Baghdad. It had been an important religious center during the Sumerian days, but it declined in power and prestige as the Old Babylonian Empire began to arise. These excavations produced 30,000-40,000 clay tablets, giving historical, business, and religious information from very early times of the Old Babylonian Empire into the period of Judah's exile. The excavations began as early as 1884, and were carried out intermittently until 1900. The University of Chicago, Oriental Institute and University Museum of Philadelphia began further explorations in 1948 to 1958.

Very important, at this juncture, are the archives of some Babylonian bankers and brokers of the 5th century B.C. These records are also part of the Nippur discoveries. These tablets yielded a large number of Hebrew names, along with the name of at least one Jewish mercantile business – the Murashu Sons – operating during the reigns of Artaxerxes I (464 – 423 B.C.), and Darius II (423 – 404 B.C.). This covers part of the period of the Exile of the Jews. Additional information from these tablets shows some of the types of activities which took place among the exiles showing that there were many Jews in Babylon and its environs, some of whom were successful in business and governmental positions. History shows that many of these exiles remained in the area, even when given opportunity to return to Jerusalem. These tablets also show that many of the Jews were highly regarded by the Persians who later conquered the Babylonians. During the Persian period some Jews had important positions in both government and business. This agrees with certain Biblical accounts supporting the stories of Daniel, Nehemiah, Zerubbabel, and Esther.

Although Israel's past history had been one of vacillating between loyalty to God and loyalty to the pagan gods of the Canaanites, Moabites, and others, during the Exile many of them turned back to God, and began to take the Law very seriously. They clearly saw that the misery of the Exile was God's punishment for the infidelity and apostasy of the nation. They longed for the sanctity of their temple, their homeland, and their independence. Fortunate for them, the Jews of the Babylonian Exile were not in danger of losing their identity as was the case with the kingdom of Israel and their Assyrian captivity. In many cases the exiled Jews continued their community relationships as seen in the books of Esther, Daniel, and Ezekiel. It must be remembered that the Babylonian Exile was not a reenactment of the Egyptian enslavement of Israel. Certainly many of them were thought of as foreigners, displaced persons, and a lower class of peoples. They did not have the rights and privileges of Babylonians, they were in a pagan land, away from their own temple and worship, and were probably humiliated in many. In spite of this, their lives were generally bearable, once they took the advice of such prophets as Ezekiel.

On the other hand, Psalms 137 gives us a picture of the wretchedness of the Exile. It is a psalm of lamentation. In this poem a group of Jews were mourning over their plight and

weeping for their homeland. They were feeling the spite of their captors whom they viewed as tormentors. They hung their harps on the poplar trees, too distressed to play them and sing the songs of Zion. They viewed their former worship at the Jerusalem temple and songs of Zion as expressions of joy and happiness, in great contrast to the troubles they were experiencing in Babylon. To them, Babylon was an unclean land. It personified polytheism, immorality, corruption and excess, strange gods, and every evil the Jews could imagine. These things had become obnoxious to them, even though many had participated in these same evil practices shortly before to the Exile. They asked God to curse the Babylonians for what they had done, for the Jews still considered themselves to be the people of God.

Babylon During the Exile

Nebuchadnezzar ruled Babylon for about 43 years, 605-562 B.C. His military campaigns reached far and wide, resulting in a great deal of tax money and booty being brought to Babylon from the conquered nations. This produced great prosperity. His ambitious construction projects included rebuilding some of the temples of his gods, refurbishing the city of Babylon and other important cities, and embellishing the famous ziggurat (temple tower) as well as other shrines. He built palaces, fortified the city of Babylon with walls, and built the legendary Hanging Gardens of Babylon, considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World. In modern times the Hanging Gardens have been called into question, and are now thought by some to be only legendary. By every measurement though, Nebuchadnezzar must be considered one of the great builders of ancient times and outstanding military strategist.

The country of Media, just west of modern day Iran, was a neighbor of Babylon. During much of this time that Nebuchadnezzar was building Babylon, Cyaxares, King of Media (c. 625-585 B.C.) was building a massive empire of his own. He captured what is modern day Iran, and drove eastward to Armenia and on into parts of Asia Minor. The death of Nebuchadnezzar in 562 B.C. brought a considerable degree of chaos to the Empire. This left his son, Evil-merodach in power who was then followed by two rather insignificant rulers. Finally Nabonidus came to power along with his son, crown-prince Belshazzar. Each of these men had distinct weaknesses contributing to general deterioration of the government and the morale of the populace.

The Book of Daniel

Some of the events in the book of Daniel took place during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel 2 speaks of the empire dream of Nebuchadnezzar, and Daniel's interpretation of it. This is a prediction of the coming kingdom of God which is fulfilled in the New Testament. Chapters 3 and 4 contain additional stories of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar. Other events in the book took place during the reign of Belshazzar and the Persian ruler Darius. The chapters are not arranged in chronological order.

Belshazzar was the crown prince of Babylon during the reign of his father Nabonidus (556-539 B.C.). Both Belshazzar and Nabonidus were self-indulgent, and Nabonidus had

alienated the people of Babylon by spending an inordinate amount of time at his favorite resorts in Arabia. During the closing years of the Babylonian Empire, Belshazzar, his son, actually ruled the Empire.

During a lavish drunken banquet, given by Belshazzar, a hand appeared on the wall and wrote in a language no one could read. Belshazzar was terrified at this spectacle, and offered a very high reward to any one among the royal court's wise men who could decipher the writing. No one was found. The queen remembered that Daniel, one of the Jewish exiles, had interpreted the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar, and suggested that he be brought in. Daniel interpreted the handwriting on the wall. Its meaning was that Belshazzar's days have been numbered, his kingdom would be brought to an end, he had been weighed in the balance and found wanting, and his kingdom would be divided and given to the Medes and Persians. This took place that very night when the army of Cyrus, king of Persia, captured the city of Babylon. The year was 539 B.C. See Daniel 5:1-29.

The Cyrus Cylinder is a small clay cylinder discovered by Harmuzd Rassam in 1882. It is now in the British Museum. On it Cyrus, king of Persia, had inscribed some thoughts about himself and his accomplishments, giving credit for his success to the god, Marduk. He writes, "Marduk . . . looked through all the countries, searching for a righteous ruler . . . He pronounced the name of Cyrus, King of Anshan, declared him to be the ruler of all the world. . . He made him set out on the road to Babylon, going at his side like a real friend." Concerning the actual capture of Babylon, the Nabonidus Chronicle says, "The 16th day . . . the army of Cyrus entered Babylon without battle." The Persians were clearly in power with the proclamation of Cyrus that he was "king of the world, great king, legitimate king, king of Babylon . . ."

There seems to be some confusion over the name of Darius, being mentioned in the Biblical record, and Cyrus, mentioned in the Nabonidus Chronicle, but there is so little information given that a conclusion is difficult to come by. The Chronicle also tells us that the people of Babylon had become very dissatisfied with the policies and conduct of the Babylonian kings, and this discontent caused them to consider Cyrus a liberator and a welcomed change. Although there may be some bias reflected in this statement, Herodotus, the Greek historian speaks of the discontent of the Babylonian people.

Cyrus' style of governing was quite different from that of the Babylonians, and he issued a decree providing for the Jews and exiles from other nations to return to their homelands. This was almost a total reversal of the deportation policies of both the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Other events described in the book of Daniel took place under both Cyrus and Darius.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah lived and worked just prior to, and during the Babylonian exile. Prior to the exile a group of Jews in Jerusalem wanted to rebel against the domination of Babylonian, believing that there was help to come from Egypt. Jeremiah spoke strongly against this, warning them that this was not an alternative. Jeremiah was captured by the Babylonians

when Nebuchadnezzar once again attacked the city in 587 B.C., this time to destroy it. Jeremiah was released, only to be forced to go to Egypt with the party of Jews who fled there.

Almost nothing is said about the life of the Jews who fled to Egypt, but we know from non-Biblical sources (the Elephantine Papyri) that they established a colony on the Elephantine Island in the Nile River in the southern part of Egypt. Later, during the Hellenistic Period some Jews settled in Alexandria, Egypt near the western part of the Nile delta.

Other Events During the Exile

Ezekiel was a priest, and one of the Jews of the Babylonian exile. He dates his book during the reign of Jehoiachin, king of Judah (Ezekiel 1:1-2), thus placing himself at the very beginning of the Exile. Both he and Jeremiah viewed their primary task as one of convincing the Jews to settle down in Babylon, the land of their exile, and make the best of a very bad situation. The ancient Babylonians used captives from various lands to build up their own economies by encouraging them to be productive. For the Jews, this was perceived as great punishment, because they were away from Jerusalem and their promised land. The captive Jews looked to Ezekiel for guidance. The entire period of the Exile was about seventy years.

As far back as the Assyrian Empire (1100-605 B.C.), the Aramaic language was being spoken in many Middle Eastern nations. By 701 B.C. it was becoming the language of international commerce, and came to be the language spoken by the Jews of Jesus day. Even so, the cuneiform script continued to be used by at least six different languages until the first century B.C.

Returning to Jerusalem

Relatively little is known about the return of the exiles from Babylon, but the books of Ezra and Nehemiah give some detail about this period, along with some additional information found in the post-exilic prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Once again there are some chronological problems, this time relating to the exact times that Ezra and Nehemiah worked. Therefore the dates given here are approximate. The Old Testament ended shortly after the beginning of the return of the Jews. The Jewish nation underwent significant changes as a result of the exile.

The Beginning of the Restoration to Jerusalem

The Jews who returned did so in four groups. Some however, chose to remain in Babylon and its environs because the exile had not been severe to them. The decree of Cyrus in 538 B.C. encouraged captives throughout the Empire to return to their native lands. Under the leadership of Sheshbazzar some of the Jews began to return to Jerusalem. He is described as a “prince of Judah,” and was of Davidic ancestry. See I Chron. 3:18 which speaks of Shenazzar as a son of Jehoiachin. This is generally thought to have been

a variation of the name Sheshbazzar. When returning, these former exiles carried with them many of the gold vessels for the Jerusalem temple which had been removed by Nebuchadnezzar at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. See Ezra 1:9-11. This group is credited with laying the foundation of the temple, but some of them became discouraged and the construction was halted.

A second group returned from Babylon, probably around 520 B.C. under the leadership of Zerubbabel. Reconstruction of the temple, which had been begun under Sheshbazzar, was finally completed in about 516 B.C. under the supervision of Zerubbabel, but not without difficulty and opposition from some of the locals. See Ezra 4-6. Zerubbabel was a Jew who had been appointed governor of Judea, and was assisted by Jeshua a priest.

Poor unskilled Israelites and the captives of other nations sent to Israel by the Assyrians, occupied parts of the middle and southern portions of Palestine at this time. They intermarried, and a mixed race of people resulted. These people were later referred to as the Samaritans, and were despised by the returning Jews. They worshipped God, but did so with a heavy influence of paganism. At first they offered to join in the rebuilding, but their help was refused by Zerubbabel and Jeshua. This resulted in conspiracies and great opposition from three men and their followers. They were Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. Sanballat is mentioned in the Elephantine Papyri as governor of Judea. A combination of Biblical and non-Biblical texts shows that there were many governors of Judea during this general time period. Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, Sanballat, and Nehemiah are all spoken of as governors of Judea. There could have been others whose names are not known. The return to Jerusalem was begun under somewhat ideal circumstances under Cyrus, but by the time Darius I (522-486 B.C.), Xerxes (486-465 B.C.), and Artaxerxes (465-425 B.C.) came to the throne opposition from the Samaritans increased sharply and the work of the returning Jews was suspended. Ezra 4:17-24. At the direction of Darius I, the Persian archives were searched, and the decree from Cyrus was discovered, authorizing the Jews to rebuild their temple. The Jews were then allowed to continue their work with encouragement from the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

A third group of returnees was led by Nehemiah, possibly around 445-440 B.C. While serving in the palace at Susa, Nehemiah received word from his brother, Hanani about the deplorable conditions in Jerusalem, mainly that the walls of the city were still in disrepair, the gates had been burned, and not replaced, and the city in general was in bad condition. Permission was given by King Artaxerxes I for Nehemiah to go to Jerusalem and supervise the rebuilding of the walls. Nehemiah was also appointed governor of Judea, and construction and, upon his arrival, repair of the walls of Jerusalem began almost immediately.

Once again, strong opposition came from the Samaritans, led by Sanballat, governor of Samaria, Tobiah, governor of Ammon, and Geshem, an official of a province in Arabia. In spite of this, and with the heroic efforts of the Jews under Nehemiah's leadership, the wall was completed. This gave the city a defensible character, and the Jews once again felt a measure of security in their own country. The wall was dedicated later amidst a great celebration.

Ezra Reads the Law Publicly

While Nehemiah was supervising the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, a fourth group of Jews returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra. He was described as a competent scribe, probably meaning that he was well educated. He was also well versed in the Law of Moses, and was instrumental in reinstituting observance of the Law and reviving some of the religious ceremonial days and the worship. His work set the standard for much of Post-Exilic Judaism's religious attitudes and observances which continued for generations.

He read the Law aloud to the assembly of people from daybreak until noon while they stood and listened intently. He showed the people their neglect of the important feasts and other religious celebrations of the Jews. They celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles for the first time in generations. See Nehemiah 8:14. Various other religious reforms were instituted, including strict observance of the Sabbath Day and condemnation of mixed marriages.

Many of the practices of Orthodox Judaism today grew out of the foundations laid during this period. Some of these practices were instituted by Ezra but some became excessive and legalistic by the time of Jesus Christ, approximately four hundred years later. Many factors impacted these observances and traditions.

Among other accomplishments of Ezra was the appointment of Levites and priests to officiate at the temple. For the next ninety years the Jews continued to live under Persian rule, but almost nothing is known about their history during that time. The single exception to this is the fragmentary information we have of the Elephantine Colony and Elephantine Papyri, and some information from the books of Maccabees. With these events, the history of the Old Testament closes. This is about 400 B.C.

Epilogue

The theological history of Israel did not end with the close of the Old Testament. It continued through the New Testament, and in fact, comes authoritatively into our own generation. Christianity finds its basis in Israel as the people of God, and the relationship between God and Christians is symbolized by the relationship between God and ancient Israel. In speaking of Israel's history, Paul tells us that their experiences become our examples and warnings, and are preserved for our learning and admonition, I Corinthians 10:6-12.

The principles of God's work among human beings, his sovereignty, and intervention are spelled out in the history of Israel as a nation. His sovereignty, though beyond human comprehension, continues today in the history of the world, with the ultimate goal being that God's will be done "on earth as it is in heaven." In Israel, God had a chosen physical nation. Today, the church, which Paul referred to as the "Israel of God," is his nation, intended to be made up of people of all nations, ethnicities, and cultures, without distinction or preference. His work is to be honored, as he continues to reveal himself through Jesus Christ in the writings of the New Testament. Israel of the Old Testament anticipated the coming of a Messiah – the anointed one from God. The New Testament reveals this Messiah in the person of Jesus Christ.

We cannot study Israel's history without being stunned at the nation's apostasy, idolatry, immorality, and other departures from God's covenant law. The corruption within the nation arrests our attention. The depth of their disregard for God's directives is vivid. Their lack of gratitude to God and their forgetfulness of past blessings are always evident. We wonder about them as God's chosen people. Their lives and values had become indistinguishable from the lifestyles and values of the pagan nations close by. Yet, through all of this chaos, confusion, corruption, and immorality God stayed true to his promises to bring the Messiah into the world to offer the final and perfect sacrifice for all of the sins of mankind. The statement of Paul is fully illuminated as we look at Israel's history – and our own personal history! "But God commended his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Rom. 5:8. The words of Jesus ring true: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." Matt. 20:28.

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